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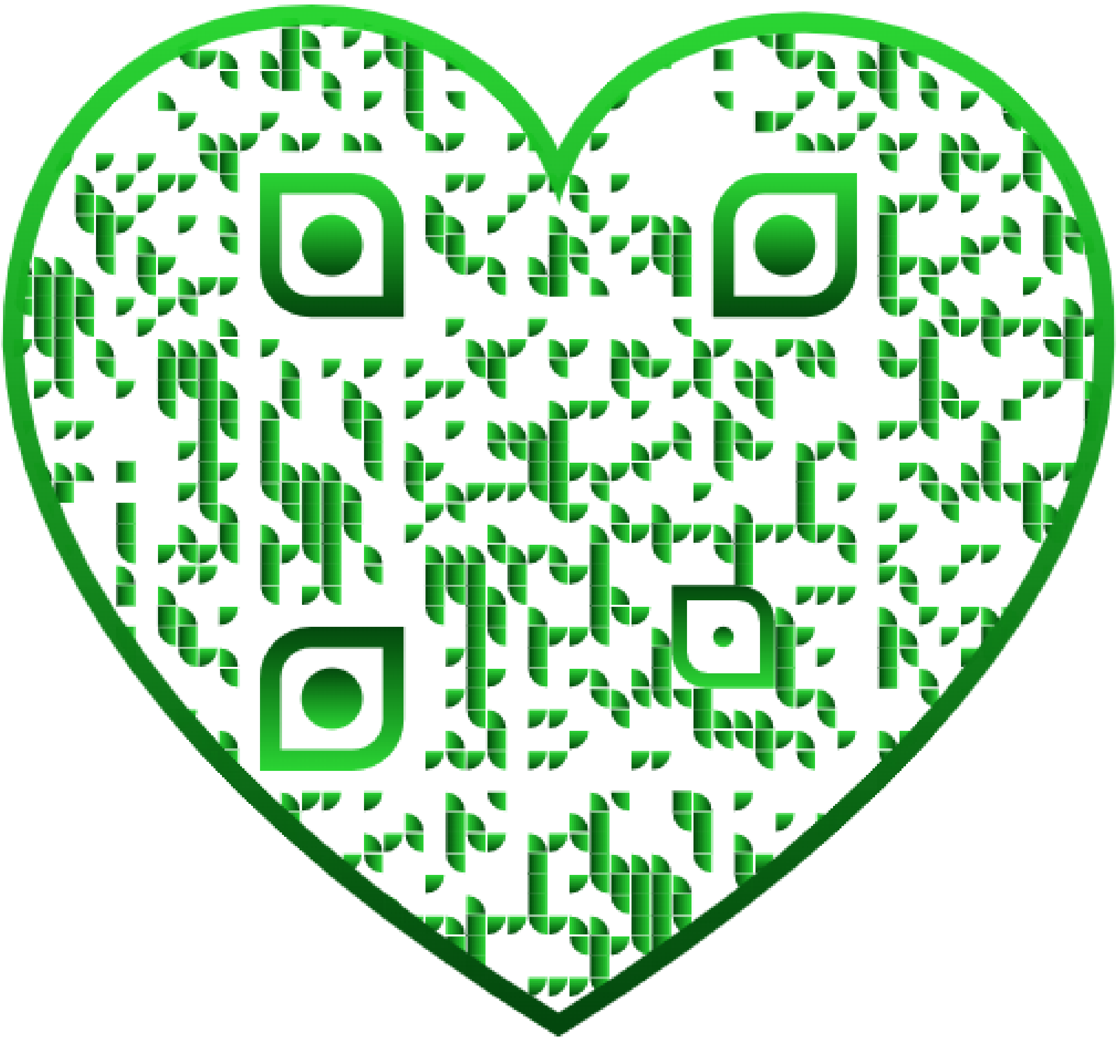

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COMMENT

AT LAST WE CAN BUST A BIG MYTH ABOUT EV BATTERIES

Along with range anxiety, concerns over battery life and degradation are often cited as a key reason for people being put off buying an electric vehicle. If you've struggled with an ageing smartphone, it's understandable you'd be concerned about driving an EV that can travel fewer miles the longer you own it.

Because EVs are relatively new, it's been a hard myth to bust. There have been plenty of scare stories from EV sceptics but the information to prove them wrong hasn't really existed. However, now that mainstream EVs have been on the road for more than a decade, we're starting to get proper data about how long EV batteries really last. And, as Vicky Parrott outlines on p50, the answer is likely to be a lot longer than you think.

In fact, the lifespan of an EV is broadly in line with that of an ICE vehicle (so far longer than average buyers own their cars for). Some EVs are racking up big mileage without exhibiting as much battery degradation as was first expected. And not only is battery technology still improving but companies are also getting better at repairing and refreshing them.

There are many valid reasons why people might not buy an EV, but the latest research suggests that battery life shouldn't be one of them. In a complex car market, buying decisions should be driven by facts, not assumptions.

James Attwood, associate editor
james.attwood@haymarket.com

Meanwhile, online...

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Tesla Model Y – why it's suddenly less annoying

Major updates have changed it. But are all the tweaks for the better? Illya Verpraet delivers the verdict.

Autocar meets Andersen EV CEO David Martell

Boss of high-end home charger firm talks to Cropley and Prior about EVs and infrastructure.

Retro Rides Weekender

Head to our Instagram page to see some of the UK's most nostalgic head-turners from Retro Rides at Goodwood circuit.

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"I have achieved a state of grace about the number of pizza ovens or bobbins or lizards I own" p18

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will.rimell@haymarket.com

M2 CS REVEALED AS BABY M CAR’S ICE SWANSONG

New model is likely to be the final M2 powered purely by combustion

The new BMW M2 CS has been unveiled, and it could be the final version of the brand’s junior sports car to feature pure combustion power.

Priced from £86,800, the stripped-out, track-focused sports car is the first variant of the ‘G87’ M2 to be launched and comes six years after the original M2 CS (Competition Sport).

While that car was rated at 444bhp (40bhp more than the ‘F87’ M2), this new CS puts out 523bhp – 50bhp more than the standard M2, using the same turbocharged 3.0-litre straight six. The increase in power takes it above its 493bhp Porsche 718 Cayman GT4 RS rival.

The CS’s 479lb ft of torque means the model is offered exclusively with an eight-speed automatic gearbox; the manual, says BMW, is limited to 406lb ft. The German firm adds that dwindling customer demand also informed the decision not to offer a manual option in the CS.

Given that it is a CS, a key part of the brief was to again make it as light as possible. To that end, carbonfibre has been used extensively – the metal roof and boot panels have been switched out – to drop its weight by 30kg over the standard M2 for a kerb weight of 1700kg. In all, this contributes to a 0-62mph sprint time of 3.8sec.

To cope with the power, the CS gets stiffer engine mounts and bespoke spring and damper tuning, while the steering, brakes and differentials have also been upgraded. The CS is also offered with an optional lightweight titanium M Performance exhaust. Designed specifically for the track-honed model, it offers a “more aggressive

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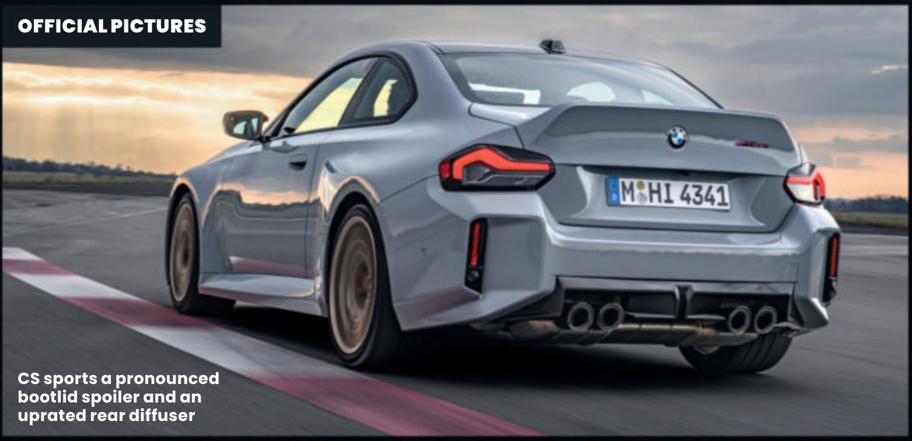


CS sports a pronounced bootlid spoiler and an uprated rear diffuser

soundscape", says BMW.

The CS is 8mm closer to the road than the standard M2, and the new carbonfibre panels also alter the look of the coupé: the bootlid now features an integrated ducktail-type rear spoiler, and there is a chunkier rear diffuser than previously. A new lightweight alloy wheel design features, too, and it is available exclusively with a Golden Bronze finish. Four paint finishes are offered: Black Sapphire, Portimao Blue, Brooklyn Grey and Velvet Blue.

Inside, the M2 CS gets an Alcantara steering wheel with carbonfibre paddles, as well as the M Carbon bucket seats that are available as an optional extra on other models. The centre console, too, is made from carbonfibre and features a red CS badge.

Despite its hardcore positioning, the CS is offered with creature comforts that include a heated steering wheel, three-zone climate control, a head-up display and a Harman Kardon sound system.

The CS will be produced in limited numbers, with UK deliveries starting towards the end of the summer.
CHARLIE MARTIN

■ Interested in the new M2 CS but can't stretch to £87k? Turn to p54 for some tidy used alternatives

> **"This new M2 CS puts out 523bhp, 50bhp more than the standard M2"**

Suspension, brakes and running gear are upgraded to cope with extra power

CS's cabin goes large on carbonfibre; eight-speed 'box is auto-only

Weight is down by 30kg over regular M2, aided by carbonfibre roof and boot

WHAT'S NEXT FOR THE M2?

In three years' time, BMW will launch its first Neue Klasse performance model in the next M3. With dynamic capability previewed by the Vision Driving Experience concept (pictured), that car will move onto the new EV-focused Gen6 platform. In line with BMW's commitment to combustion – and to maximise its appeal – it will be sold alongside an updated variant of today's ICE-powered model.

Following on from that, BMW has committed to updating its entire range and placing them all on that new flexible architecture, which opens the door for another M2.

While not yet confirmed, a third-gen M2 is therefore fairly plausible given both the popularity of a small, bare-bones M car and that the new NK platform has a rear-wheel-drive bias.

To that end, any new M2 is likely to follow the new M3, given today's models share a platform (CLAR) and a powertrain: the S58 twin-turbo 3.0-litre straight six that has been made compliant with upcoming emissions regulations.

When a new M2 could arrive is still unknown. The current car landed in 2023, and with model generations typically spanning five to seven years (the previous generation was launched in 2016), we can speculate that a third-generation M2 won't arrive until at least the turn of the decade.

The Emira is sold in four-pot turbo or V6 form, but an AMG V8 could be on the cards

LOTUS PLOTS V8 OPTION FOR EMIRA SPORTS CAR

British coupé could switch from V6 power to go after 911 GT3

Lotus is poised to offer a V8 engine option for the Emira sports car as the manufacturer looks to expand the appeal of the only combustion-engined model in its line-up.

The Geely-owned firm is committed to offering a higher-powered version of the Emira, CEO Feng Qingfeng told investors on its recent earnings call. "We are currently investigating the feasibility of the V8," he revealed.

Lotus currently offers V6 and four-cylinder turbo engine options for the Emira. Both produce 400bhp, but Feng ruled out boosting the power on the V6 because the Toyota-sourced unit wouldn't comply with upcoming Euro 7 emissions regulations.

Lotus had intended to phase out the V6 in favour of the AMG-supplied four-cylinder unit, but the six-pot has been enduringly popular in the US, which prompted the investigation into fitting a bigger engine.

The recently announced UK/US tariff deal will renew optimism that the Hethel-built Emira – of which US exports are currently on hold – can continue to make a mark on the world's largest sports car market.

Hethel boss and new CEO of Lotus Cars in Europe Matt Windle, speaking to Autocar in an exclusive interview following his promotion from managing director, said: "The US is an incredibly important market for us and the car. It always has been. So we're looking at the market demand for the product going forward."

Windle didn't confirm the V8 but said the company was looking into other power options. "It's a very, very competent product that we probably haven't exploited to its full already. We are looking at all the options."

Lotus supplier AMG could in theory supply the V8. "There are some opportunities with the current supplier of engines, so we're looking at it," said Windle, without naming Mercedes' performance division. AMG also supplies its 4.0-litre twin-turbo V8 to Aston Martin for use in the Vantage sports car and DBX SUV. However, it remains to be seen how much adaptation the mid-engined Emira's compact frame would require in order to accommodate a larger engine.

A new eight-cylinder Lotus would be the first such model since the brand dropped the Esprit V8 from its line-up in 2004, after a run of eight years.

Feng's announcement that the company was considering a V8 came in response to a question from a US dealer who suggested the company should offer a stripped-down, high-power V6 that would be quick enough to challenge the Porsche 911 GT3.

The 510bhp GT3 starts at £158,200 in the UK. That is considerably more than the £92,500 Emira V6, which gives Lotus the opportunity to raise its average selling price and help reverse company losses.

Lotus had intended to replace the Emira with an electric sports car but is currently assessing the market before giving it the green light. "Is the market ready for an electric sports car?" said Windle. "I don't really know the answer yet."

NICK GIBBS

AUTOCAR IMAGE

Electric Lotus sports car is no longer an immediate priority

Current Lotus line-up includes the Eletre and Emeya (pictured) EVs

NEW LIFE BECKONS FOR HETHEL PLANT

Windle wants to make the most of Hethel's production capability

THE NEW BOSS of Lotus Europe is seeking to broaden production at the brand's UK base to include new models from the wider Geely group.

Lotus Cars Europe CEO Matt Windle is keen to boost output at Hethel, which earlier this year announced 270 job cuts as demand for the Emira petrol-engined sports car was hit by the sharp increase in US tariffs.

"It has been a turbulent start to the year, which has had an impact on the business," he said.

Lotus last year posted record Emira wholesales (sales to dealers) of 5272, up 102%, but Windle is keen to push close to the factory's production limit of 10,000 cars annually.

"Back in the late 1990s and 2000s we were building several models at Hethel [including the Elise-based Vauxhall VX220 and Tesla Roadster]," he said. "That's a business model we're exploring."

One possibility is the forthcoming Polestar 6 electric roadster – the drop-top sibling to the 5, sharing that car's UK-engineered, performance-oriented underpinnings. "I think we could build it," said Windle. "There's an element of transition, because at the moment it's just ICE [at Hethel], but we're going to have to go on that journey."

The US's car import tariffs have hit Lotus hard, with the company cancelling sales of the Chinese-built Emeya and Eletre models in the country due to the currently insurmountable financial hurdles.

Lotus has also halted shipments of the British-built Emira to the US after the new 25% tariff was applied in April, with the result being that no Lotus cars are heading to a market that last year accounted for one-fifth of all the brand's sales.

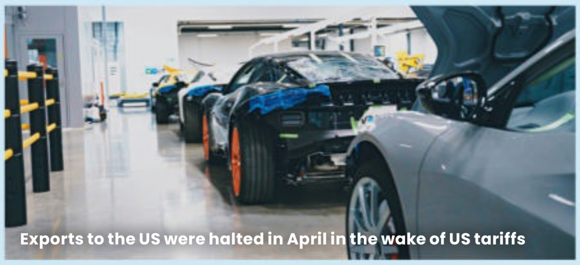
The deal recently agreed between the UK and US to lower tariffs to 10% has helped Lotus, but Windle has yet to give the green light to restarting shipments to the US as he awaits details.

"The headline numbers have gone out there, but actually the specifics behind it still haven't been clarified," he said.

"There's product that's ready to ship, but what we don't want to do is jump the gun and end up getting clobbered.

"The tariffs are a negative with where we are now, but they could be a positive."

New Polestar 6 could in theory be produced at the Hethel plant


Exports to the US were halted in April in the wake of US tariffs

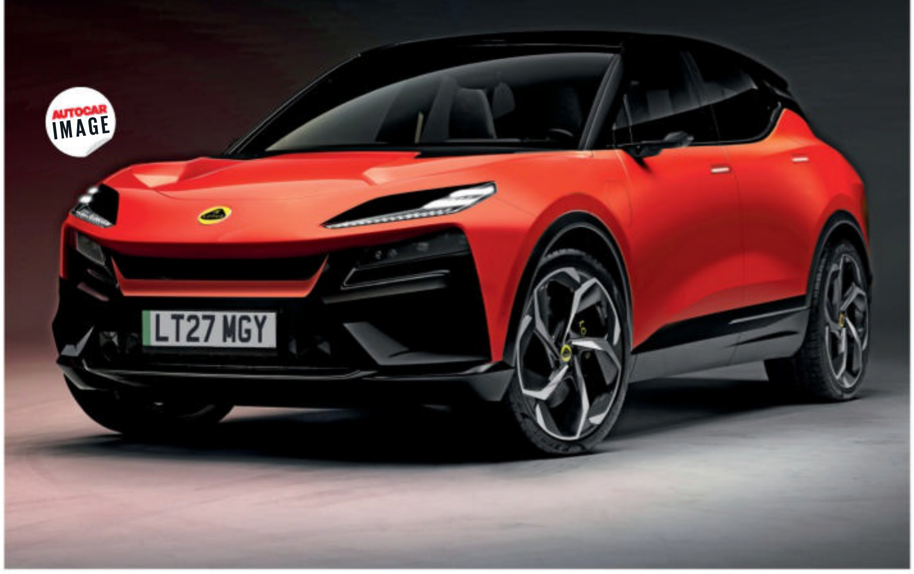
RANGE-EXTENDERS EXTEND LOTUS RANGE

Lotus's volume growth has been impressive, given where it has come from, with overall deliveries totalling 12,134 in 2024 – double that of the year before.

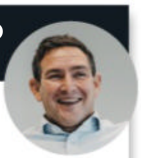
However, electric vehicle sales have fallen short of expectations in line with a lower than anticipated demand for luxury battery-powered models.

Lotus intends to counter this shortfall with the planned launch of its 'Hyper Hybrid' range-extender EVs that use a combustion engine as an on-board generator to top up the traction battery.

The first such model will be unveiled at the end of this year – and could be the long-mooted Type 134 (imagined below) – with sales starting in China early next year. No date has yet been set for European sales.



Q&A MATT WINDLE, PRESIDENT AND CEO, LOTUS CARS EUROPE



Lotus Cars (Hethel) recently merged with Lotus Technology (Wuhan). How will that change things?
"The reunification of the business is going to be a real positive. It has probably been a bit disjointed in some areas over the past couple of years. You can see Geely's business strategy is now much more about unification and technology-sharing – things like that. That's where it should be. The whole point of Lotus being within a big global company is to use the benefits that come with that but still maintain its brand identity and be different and be British."

Are Geely management still as dedicated to the Lotus Project as ever?
"They are. We're part of a very strong portfolio, and I think they still see Lotus as the jewel in the crown, the jewel in that portfolio. Lotus for me should always be a brand that's innovative, keen to try new ideas and be at the forefront, and I think that's a sweet spot for us."

Lotus under Geely has had a turbulent start with Covid, tariffs and swings in EV demand. Is the direction of travel becoming more clear?
"The beauty of now having the range out there is that we are getting direct customer feedback. It was difficult before, because we only had the three Es [Elise, Exige, Evora] to try to work out how people would accept the change in the brand. But they have, so now we have a much more knowledge-based database to go on."

ALPINE A390 SETS SIGHTS ON PORSCHE MACAN EV

Tri-motor SUV will hit the UK next year with 464bhp and a honed driver focus

Alpine is going up against the Porsche Macan Electric and Hyundai Ioniq 5 N with its first SUV, the A390.

The French performance brand's third model line – joining the A110 coupé and A290 hot hatch – is a sleek, striking crossover-coupé that remains largely true to the A390 Beta concept revealed at the Paris motor show last year.

Due to start from around £60,000 when UK orders open in November, the A390 will play a significant role in broadening the market reach of Alpine's product portfolio. Its dimensions place it right at the heart of Europe's most popular car class and it has a more overt focus on daily usability than the brand's dedicated sports cars.

It measures 4.6m long by 1.5m tall and has a 532-litre boot, which makes it a close match for the likes of the Cupra Tavascan and Tesla Model Y. But with up to 464bhp and a drivetrain that has been engineered with a rigid focus on driver engagement, the A390 is pitched more directly at the dedicated performance SUV segment.

The A390 shares its basic Ampr Medium architecture with the Renault Scenic and Nissan Ariya. However, it uses a bespoke tri-motor powertrain – two at the rear and one at the front – to give rear-biased all-wheel drive and torque vectoring to boost agility and responsiveness.

Alpine CEO Philippe Krief recently told Autocar that this arrangement will play a key role in instilling the A390 with a "perceived lightness" that helps to mitigate the inherent weight penalty associated with an electric SUV.

"You can generate a quite immediate response time. It's like the behaviour of a light car," said Krief of the tri-motor powertrain, which is capable of overspeeding the outside wheels in a

RAPID-CHARGE BYD PHEVs GET 124-MILE EV RANGE

BYD IS PRIMING a line-up of new plug-in hybrids with 124 miles of electric-only range and the ability to rapid-charge at speeds of more than 150kW.

Due within "the next one to two years", the DM-i-badged cars will have substantially greater capacity to operate as EVs than their rivals.

At present, the longest electric range of any PHEV on the UK market is 88 miles, offered by the Volkswagen Golf eHybrid, and the best from BYD is the 77 miles provided by the Seal U, which can be charged at only 18kW.

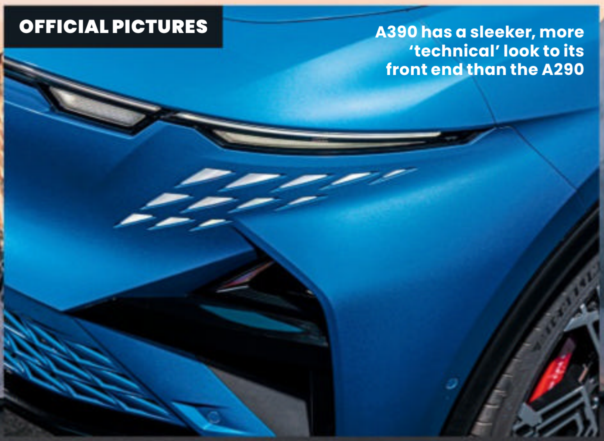
BYD executive vice-president Stella Li said: "Our target is really to have people in daily use using the EV [mode], but then if they want long distance, given a chance to charge, they have the freedom to go to anything."

The current DM-i system combines BYD's Blade Battery tech with its Xiaoyun petrol engine, which was

Regen dial on the wheel and 'push to pass' lever signal its driver focus

Two rear motors and one at the front are said to deliver agile handling

ALPINE
A390


OFFICIAL PICTURES

A390 has a sleeker, more 'technical' look to its front end than the A290

bend, rather than simply braking the inside wheels. Alpine says this gives a "much smoother, delicate feeling of control", while also allowing for easily controllable powerslides.

Producing 395bhp in standard GT guise and 464bhp in the top-rung, circa-£70k GTS – and with a peak torque output of 596lb ft – this powertrain can send the A390 from 0-62mph in as little as 3.9sec. That matches the stripped-out A110 R, which weighs around a tonne less.

A cheaper variant with a more conventional dual-motor arrangement is understood to be on the cards, but it has not yet been officially given the green light.

The A390 is powered by an 89kWh battery that enables a maximum WLTP range of 342 miles and can be rapid-charged at speeds of up to 190kW.

Inside, the A390 is more closely related to its Renault Group siblings, with a portrait-oriented touchscreen angled towards the driver and a host of physical controls on the steering wheel and centre console.

It follows the A290 in gaining a race-inspired adjustment dial on the steering wheel for the brake regen and an overtake lever that liberates the full-power reserves for short periods.

Unlike the Ioniq 5 N, the A390 does not feature a simulated gearbox, but it does offer the option of a synthetic 'Alpine drive sound', which is said to be inspired by the A110's four-cylinder petrol engine.

The A390 is the second of seven electric cars that Alpine plans to launch in the coming years. Due next is an electric successor to the A110, which will be offered as a coupé and a cabriolet. After that, the brand will reveal the A310, a four-door fastback to rival the Polestar 4.

Two larger E-segment models – including a Porsche Cayenne competitor – were set to arrive after the A310 as part of the brand's push into the US market. However, president Donald Trump's new car import tariffs have prompted Alpine to put its Stateside ambitions on ice and it remains to be seen whether those cars will see the light of day.

Today's A110, launched in 2017 as the first Alpine model in more than three decades, will be withdrawn from sale next year.

FELIX PAGE

designed specifically for PHEV use and is claimed to have world-leading thermal efficiency.

BYD's special advisor for Europe, Alfredo Altavilla, said the firm has developed this tech as "PHEV has become the new battleground" for manufacturers.

He added that "a lot of manufacturers are now trying to come closer to our plug-in hybrid technology with the range-extender" because currently PHEV electric-only ranges of "35-45km" (22-28 miles) mean "you're fundamentally an internal combustion engine with a plug".

Increasingly popular in China, range-extender (REx) cars are essentially EVs with an on-board generator in the form of a small petrol engine.

Altavilla said PHEVs are "definitely superior" to REx cars because "you can have three different ways of using the car. It's your decision, depending on how much power you need from the engine, [but] the REx is always behaving in one way."

RALLY CAR CREATES STAGE FOR MOKKA GSE

Vauxhall has previewed the upcoming Mokka GSe with a rally-inspired concept car.

The Mokka GSe Rally prototype is based on the current crossover but has a more motorsport-themed design makeover and is fitted with Bilstein rally suspension, a racing gearbox and a lightened chassis.

It draws power from the same 54kWh battery as the standard Mokka but adopts the 278bhp, 254lb ft single-motor set-up that is also used in its Abarth 600e Stellantis stablemate.

These production-ready features indicate what we can expect from the upcoming Mokka GSe, a car that was recently previewed by Vauxhall-Opel CEO Florian Huettl and will be revealed in the coming months.

OFFICIAL PICTURE

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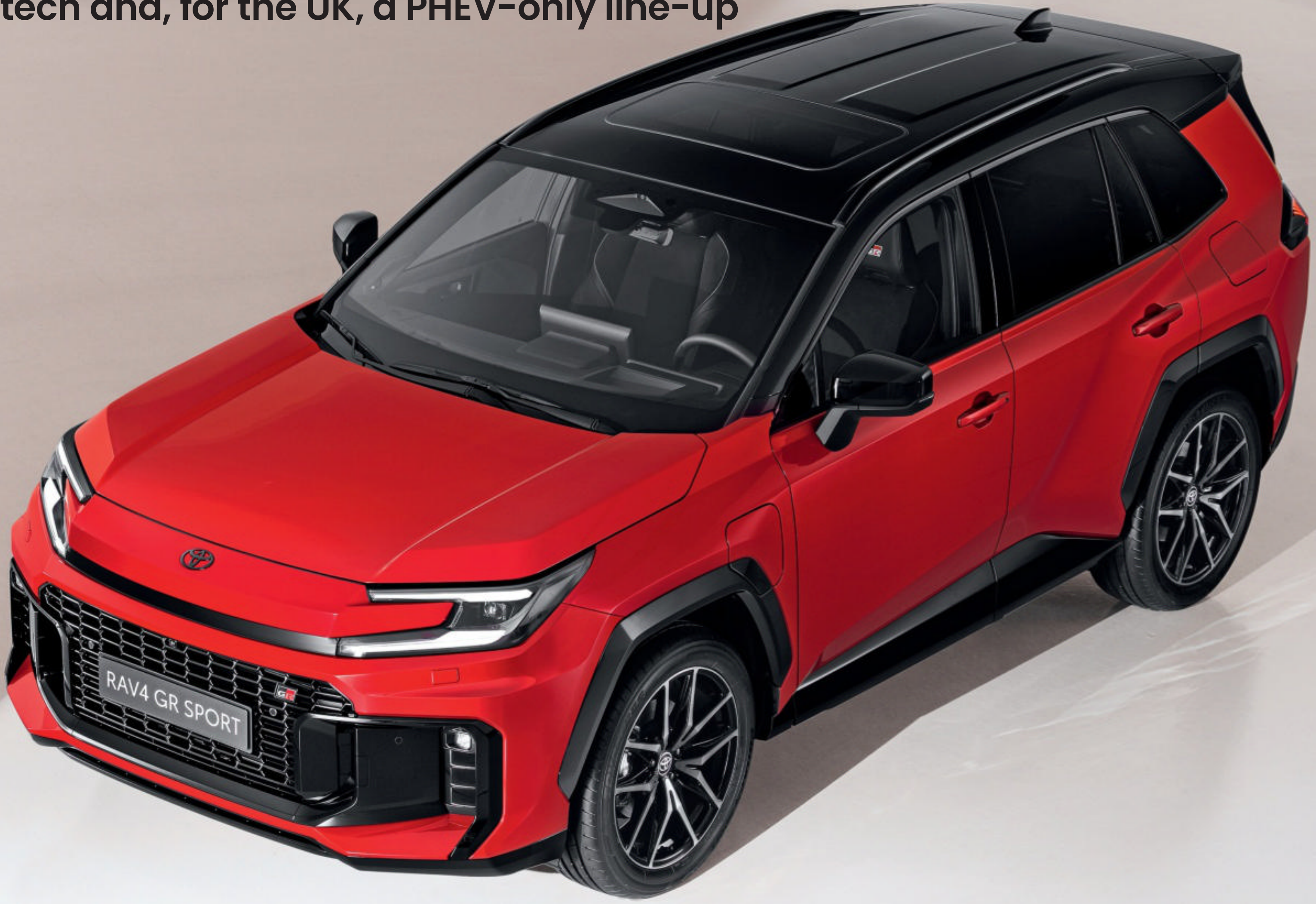
ALL-NEW RAV4 GETS BUTCH LOOK AND NEXT-GEN TECH

Chunky styling is underpinned by new-era tech and, for the UK, a PHEV-only line-up



Toyota has lifted the covers off the sixth-generation RAV4 to reveal a striking new look underpinned by a generational upgrade in on-board tech.

The family SUV's dramatic styling is said to reference the off-road credentials of earlier RAV4s, with a boxier silhouette with Land Cruiser-esque cues and chunkier wheel arches. The new hammerhead lights at the front and rear bring it into line with the likes of the latest Prius and C-HR.

Inside, it gets a new 12.9in infotainment touchscreen that is the first to run on Toyota's new Arene software – a standard operating system that will be rolled out across all future Toyotas, enabling quicker and easier development of new features.

Toyota says this will enable it to develop new and more powerful safety and entertainment systems over time, introducing new functions through over-the-air updates rather than requiring prospective buyers to wait for a new model generation.

For example, at the RAV4's launch, Arene will arrive with new safety features, such as a rear-approach monitor devised to help drivers to merge onto motorways. But in the long term, the brand has mooted functionality such as downloadable performance packs replicating the performance and feel of different Toyotas. Drivers could, for instance, choose a GR86-inspired chassis set-up for a spirited drive, before switching to more Lexus-like damping for the journey home.

The new RAV4 will be offered exclusively with plug-in hybrid powertrains in the UK. The exact specs have yet to be confirmed, but in mainland Europe there will be a choice of 264bhp front-wheel-drive and 300bhp four-wheel-drive powertrains.

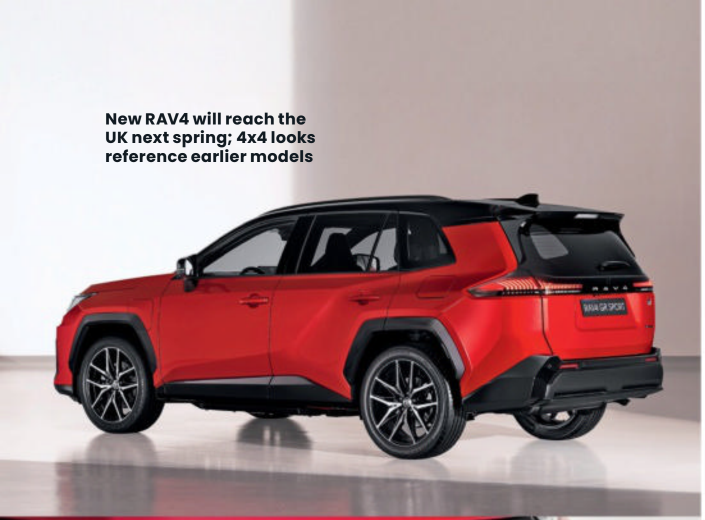
The most powerful PHEV is capable of completing 0-62mph in 5.8sec and can also drive under electric power alone for up to 62 miles. Its 22.7kWh battery can be topped up at speeds of up to 50kW on a

NEW CEO AT CITROEN

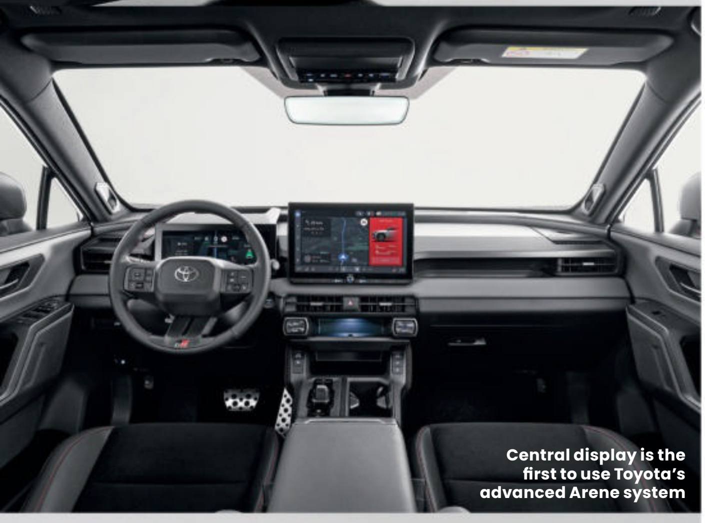
Citroën has appointed Volkswagen Group France boss Xavier Chardon as its CEO. Chardon moved to VW in 2012 after almost 20 years at Citroën. He replaces Thierry Koskas, Citroën's CEO since 2023.

SAUDI PLANT FOR HYUNDAI

A new Hyundai factory in Saudi Arabia will supply the country with 50,000 ICE and EV cars annually from the end of 2026. As well as Hyundais, models from Lucid Motors and Saudi brand Ceer will be built there.


New RAV4 will reach the UK next spring; 4x4 looks reference earlier models

RAV4 GR SPORT
GR Sport variant will have a wider track and specific suspension tune


Central display is the first to use Toyota's advanced Arene system

DC connection, taking 30 minutes to go from 10% to 80%, or at 11kW on AC.

In mainland Europe, there will also be a choice of 181bhp front-drive and 188bhp four-wheel-drive regular hybrids.

A GR Sport variant will also be offered. It will major on handling and brings lightweight 20in alloy wheels, a 20mm-wider track, different dampers and stiffer springs. Inside, it also gets bucket-like sports seats, aluminium pedals and an abundance of GR logos.

Pricing has yet to be confirmed but it is expected to represent a small step up from the current RAV4 PHEV's starting price of £44,120. Deliveries are set to begin next spring, but an exact date has yet to be determined.

CHARLIE MARTIN

TOYOTA GR PLOTS BIG GOODWOOD REVEAL

TOYOTA'S GR performance division is gearing up for a big reveal at the Goodwood Festival of Speed in July.

Speaking to Autocar, Toyota Europe vice-president Andrea Carlucci said "the UK is the most amazing country in terms of pure car lovers, even more than other countries" and that he is "attached to Goodwood".

He added: "This year, you will see something – let's put it like that."

Carlucci declined to disclose further details but said: "We have to bring [many] more cars as GR models to the marketplace and I hope the UK will bring as many as [it] wants."

Autocar has previously reported Toyota is working on a new version of the GR86 using the GR Yaris's three-pot powerplant.

Similarly, Lexus has long been preparing its new V8-powered, motorsport-honed flagship, which is expected to arrive this year and make its racing debut in 2026.

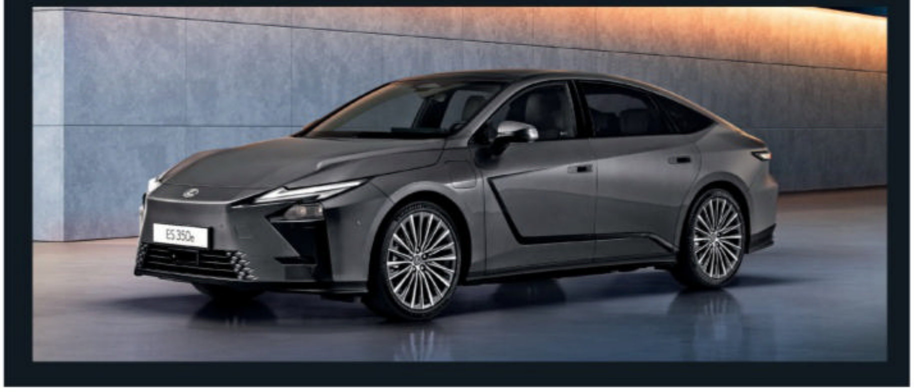
GR86 (pictured) in line for GR Yaris triple; Lexus poised with V8 flagship

NEW LEXUS ES MAY GO EV-ONLY FOR UK

The new Lexus ES saloon could ditch petrol power entirely in the UK when it arrives here next year.

While the upcoming ES will be offered as a 199bhp hybrid and two EVs elsewhere in Western Europe, Autocar understands the brand's UK arm is evaluating whether to bring the hybrid here. A key reason is the need for a greater proportion of EV sales in the UK than in the European Union.

That could leave the 221bhp front-driven ES 350e and 338bhp four-wheel-drive ES 500e as the only UK versions. Each uses a 77kWh lithium ion battery for up to 329 miles of range.

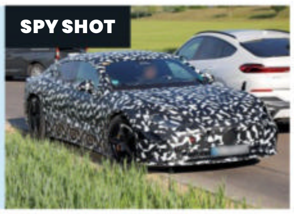


PARKING JUST GOT EASIER

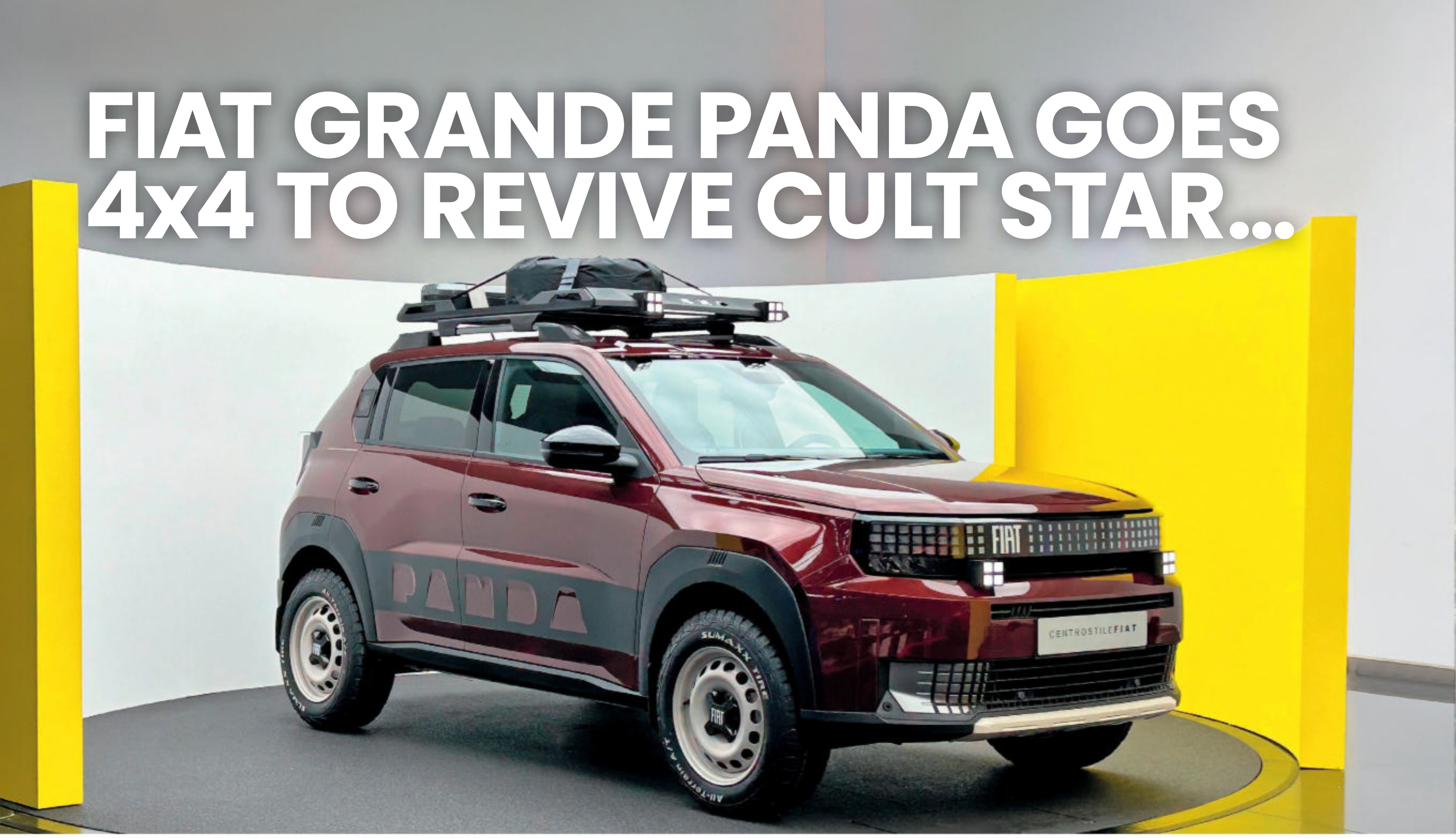
UK private car park operators will create a universal payment platform to eliminate the need for multiple apps. The National Parking Platform aims to "join hundreds of parking sites into a single system".

AMG READIES 1000BHP EV

Mercedes-AMG is ramping up testing of its Porsche Taycan-rivalling GT 4-Door EV ahead of an expected reveal next month. Tipped to offer more than 1000bhp, it will be AMG's first bespoke EV.



FIAT GRANDE PANDA GOES 4x4 TO REVIVE CULT STAR…



Spiritual successors to the Panda 4x4 and 4 Savane have been revealed

The new Fiat Grande Panda 4x4 concept previews a revival of the cult-classic go-anywhere supermini and signals the latest expansion of the Italian firm's fast-growing line-up.

The original Panda 4x4 was launched in 1983 and quickly gained a cult following thanks to the raised ride height and rugged styling elements that made it an affordable off-roader.

The revived concept is based on the new Grande Panda, which is offered with both 111bhp electric and 109bhp 1.2-litre mild-hybrid petrol powertrains and sits on Stellantis's cost-conscious new Smart Car platform.

Although Fiat hasn't officially confirmed the car's production intent, it refers to the Grande Panda 4x4 as "the next chapter" in its legacy and a "potential true symbol of versatility, reliability and freedom".

Fiat Europe boss Gaetano Thorel wouldn't confirm outright that the model will reach production but said: "Surely, we will have this car on the road in the future – but not tomorrow."

He added that there has been demand for a 4x4 version since the Grande Panda was first revealed and the firm has a desire to fulfil that need.

> **"Engineers are still working on the 4WD powertrain"**

OFFICIAL PICTURES

Concept makes its off-road remit clear; rear axle will be electrified

Although full details of the concept's drivetrain haven't been revealed, Fiat refers to it as offering an "electrified innovative rear axle".

Thorel said Fiat engineers are still working on the potential four-wheel-drive powertrain, which is tipped to use a hybrid system similar to the Jeep Avenger 4xe's. However, it will adopt the Smart Car platform and Fiat insiders hinted that it will have an electric motor powering the rear axle, although details of that unit's size have yet to be confirmed. It would most likely use a small e-axle that adds supplementary power only when required.

The Grande Panda 4x4 concept features several bespoke design cues, including dark red paintwork that echoes a special edition of the original Panda 4x4. There are also steel wheels, a protective underbody skidplate and a roof rack.
JAMES ATTWOOD

■ **Grande Panda driven, p30**

UK-BOUND LEPAS CRUCIAL TO CHERY'S EXPANSION

JAECOO AND OMODA parent Chery is gearing up to launch its third brand in the UK, called Lepas – and it hopes this three-pronged approach will help it conquer the market.

Launched globally in April, Lepas will offer an SUV line-up based on the same T1X platform as its sibling Chery brands. This means electric, hybrid and plug-in hybrid variants.

Lepas (a portmanteau of leopard and passion) will take the smaller SUVs from Chery's Tiggo range, tighten the curved look, add a new cat-eye lighting signature and aim the brand at "modern families".

Meanwhile, future Tiggos bound for Europe will be given a chunkier look targeted at more traditional family buyers, while Omoda is steered in a more edgy, modern direction, as revealed by the new 3 coming next year. Jaecoo sits more upmarket with a style that Chery has called 'British Gentleman'.

Zhang Guibing, president of Chery International, said:

OFFICIAL PICTURES

...AND SO DOES THE RENAULT 4

MEANWHILE, RENAULT HAS also strongly hinted that the new 4 crossover will gain a 4x4 variant with the unveiling of an off-road-influenced concept.

Reprising the name of an adventure-themed variant of the original Renault 4, this Savane concept rides 15mm higher than the standard car, features bespoke utility-style wheels with grippy Goodyear tyres and is decked out inside with 'deep brown' fabrics.

It also has widened tracks and contrasting black body cladding in a nod to its extra off-road potential.

But more importantly – as signalled by the bespoke 4x4 badging – the Savane is most obviously differentiated from the standard front-wheel-drive car by the addition of a second motor on the rear axle, to give permanent four-wheel drive.

Renault has not given any technical details but the front-drive car has either a 118bhp or 148bhp motor, so if the 4x4 uses another one of them at the back, it could produce somewhere in the region of 300bhp. That would give it comparable performance to the dual-motor Skoda Elroq vRS.

Renault has not officially stated plans to introduce a 4WD 4, but the Savane concept proves its Ampr Small architecture can house a dual-motor set-up, which, says the firm, shows the potential "to create a B-segment electric vehicle with four-wheel drive".

A Renault spokesperson told Autocar the firm is "currently studying the technical feasibility and the financial equation" but added: "We can't confirm anything yet about the arrival of a production 4x4."

If it reaches showrooms, the 4WD 4 will be among the smallest electric cars with a dual-motor powertrain.

The unveiling of a dual-motor 4 also opens the possibility of its lower-riding Renault 5 sibling adopting the same set-up, though it is unclear if that car's more compact body and floorpan would allow for it.

Savane concept is a dual-motor version of Renault's 4

"By offering different brands on the same platform, the volume is very big and that gives us a good price."

Lepas will launch with the L4 (pictured) and L6 compact SUVs, which will be offered with electric, plug-in hybrid or combustion-powered drivetrains. The L2 small SUV will arrive later, exclusively as an EV.

Chery is negotiating for Lepas models to be built in a Volkswagen plant in Germany, reported Automotive News Europe recently, although VW boss Thomas Schäfer has told Autocar the company has "no projects that could look in that direction".

Chinese brands have been launched and then withered in the UK before, such as GWM's Ora. However, Chery's aim is on a different scale: Omoda and Jaecoo between them notched up 8392 sales in the UK over the first four months of the year, jointly beating Citroën, Fiat, Jeep, Lexus, Seat and Suzuki.

Lepas plans to enter 27 markets globally this year, operating from 400 showrooms. In 2026, the aim is for 45 markets – including the UK – with 850 showrooms, before expanding to 89 markets in 2027. By that point, Chery hopes to be selling 500,000 cars per year.

Next big thing

JESSE CROSSE

Emblème concept is a test bed for reducing all aspects of a car's CO_2

RENAULT'S LATEST TRICKS TO CUT CARS' CARBON IMPRINT

RENAULT IS TREATING its Emblème concept as a "laboratory on wheels for low-carbon mobility". Revealed at the Paris show in October last year, it is claimed to emit the CO_2 equivalent of 90% less greenhouse gas than a 2019 petrol Captur, based on a whole life-cycle analysis.

The 4.8m-long estate is planned as a dual-energy EV with a battery and a range-extending hydrogen fuel cell system to keep it topped up if necessary. More than a concept, it's become a rolling study of how best to get small percentage gains in carbon footprint reduction by scrutinising the basics such as aerodynamics, weight and materials used in every detail of the car.

Seven materials and components account for 90% of its total carbon footprint and these are the battery, steel, aluminium, polymers, electronic components, tyres and hydrogen fuel cell system, which includes the fuel cell stack, the hydrogen storage tank and the systems that go with them.

More than 20 partners worked with Renault and its EV division, Ampere, to achieve a 70% reduction in the carbon footprint of parts production by analysing components and materials on an individual basis.

The OPmobility hydrogen fuel tank is made from carbonfibre, an industry-standard material for them, but uses low-carbon energy for the manufacturing process. Carbon emissions for the Verkor high-voltage battery are claimed to have been cut by 72% compared with a "traditional equivalent battery". The precise details of what the battery composition will be when the Emblème goes into production isn't yet clear, although Renault has told Autocar the battery will be capable of very high-speed charging.

The more conventional aspects of the car's construction include the use of advanced high-strength steels (AHSS) and press-hardenable steels (PHS) developed by ArcelorMittal, which reduce the weight of the body-in-white by 8%. Steels in the B-pillar consist of 75% recycled material produced with renewable electricity, giving an equivalent reduction in CO_2 of 69%. The use of recycled aluminium for body panels is well established in the car industry and in this case requires only 5% of the energy compared with the primary material. It can also be recycled indefinitely without deteriorating.

Less obvious areas under scrutiny include the interior, where Forvia's natural materials such as linen and pineapple, used for coverings, act as carbon sinks by absorbing CO_2 when growing. Whole-life CO_2 equivalent emissions have been halved in the headlights designed by Forvia Hella and adaptive interior lighting reduces energy consumption by 60% around town.

Adaptive lighting and natural materials also shrink the CO_2 footprint

VANS DELIVER FORD’S EUROPEAN SALES GROWTH

But lucrative Ford Pro division does much more than build Transits

Ford Pro has been the sector leader in commercial vehicles in Europe for the past 10 years, and so far in 2025 it has achieved a market share of close to 20%.

“And that’s just the vehicle business,” said Hans Schep, general manager of Ford Pro Europe, Ford’s European commercial vehicle arm. Vehicle sales aside, explained Schep, Ford Pro offers “servicing, our focus on uptime, charging, telematics, software and everything around productivity”.

The upshot is that Ford Pro in Europe is growing across the board – “really fast and really well”, according to Schep. He is keen to get across that a commercial vehicle business in 2025 is far more than white vans appearing from a production line.

“It’s really important that customers start to appreciate and understand the benefit of the whole ecosystem around the vehicle to boost their productivity,” said Schep.

At the heart of it all is the all-important uptime: the amount of time a vehicle is on the road, and Schep says this is more crucial than ever. With the help of the huge amount of data modern commercial vehicles are able to give, insights can be produced to ensure vehicles remain operational, which in turn increases business productivity.

Schep said: “Utilising the data that comes from the vehicle, both on vehicle health and on driver behaviour data, and turning that into actionable insights to improve productivity, that’s a game-changer.

“Our customers are starting to do that, understand that, and they need help to do that, and that’s where Ford Pro comes in. We don’t just sell you a vehicle; we can sell you increased productivity for your business.”

USING DATA TO PREVENT BREAKDOWNS

Ford Pro says that if a user/business opts to allow their van’s data to be used, the van maker can – with the help of machine learning – predict when a vehicle is about to have an issue and therefore intervene beforehand to keep downtime to a minimum. Repairs are carried out at a Transit Centre or by a mobile service van.

“At the heart of this is making sure your van does not break down,” said Schep. “That’s the number one pain point for fleets.”

This number-crunching and data monitoring is also moving Ford move away from typical service schedules and maintenance cycles.

“Maintenance schedules based on mileage and duration aren’t very smart ways of doing it,” said Schep. “A connected vehicle will tell you the best time to service it, because its use will be tougher than the standard schedule.

“If you follow standard intervals, you’re paying too much for maintenance. We only do what’s needed for a vehicle, and we do it to limit downtime so you don’t see any vehicles as being unproductive.”

A key part of the appeal of this paid service for businesses is that Ford crunches the data for them. And there’s a lot of data: some two billion data points globally each day from around four million

London Ambulance Service now has electric E-Transits on its fleet

Ford's van sales have achieved 20% market share so far in 2025

"We can make a case for a van to be electric based on how it is used"

connected Ford Pro vehicles on the road.

"Fleet managers at first said we were just giving them more work by giving them daily reports on their vans," said Schep. But the information is more than just technical reports, and it has other uses. Schep added: "With insights into driver behaviour, we can look at where they can save fuel through idling, with acceleration and braking."

While such services are now routinely being adopted by big fleets, only around 10% of smaller fleets are using Ford Pro for these insights. Yet the use case here is even more acute, as Schep notes: if you have a fleet of only two vans and one goes wrong, that's 50% of your revenue on hold until it is fixed.

"It's important for smaller fleets to start using these data capabilities," said Schep, adding that there are some 700,000 subscribers globally to Ford's telematics service, which makes it one of the world's biggest players in the space.

The goal is ultimately 100% uptime for a van, although Schep admitted this is implausible given the likelihood of accidents that require bodywork repairs.

"But even then, the repair time is carefully monitored," he said. "We want to avoid unnecessary downtime."

PREDICTING WHEN TO GO ELECTRIC

Data can also be used to help fleets decide whether vans are ready to be switched for electric models based on each vehicle's use case. When a van does go electric, Ford can then help run it using software that covers everything from the likes of pre-conditioning to ensuring the driver is compensated by their company for home charging.

"We can look at how that van is used and make a clear case for it being electric based on how it is used," said Schep, on Ford Pro's work with fleet managers looking to go electric. "Or indeed if it would work as a plug-in hybrid, or if it still needs to be a diesel or whatever. We can help fleet managers make that transition."

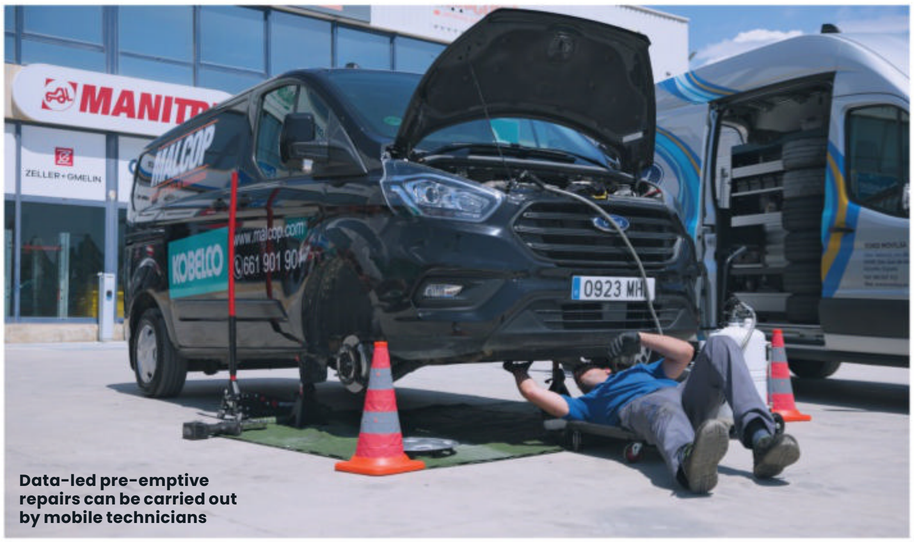
Schep admitted the electric van rollout is "behind our initial projections" but cited several reasons why. He noted two different customer types: large corporations that are committed to going carbon-neutral by a set date and those for which an electric van must fit their business through a use case.

"If you're doing city deliveries and your route is 50 miles or whatever, that's clearly an opportunity with EVs," he said. "But with long distances and any kind of heavy goods hauling, we're not there yet."

While electric vans almost always cost more than their internal-combustion-engined equivalents, Schep said a van's purchase price "is not the metric you should be looking at".

Instead, he said, it should be the total cost of ownership that a business thinks about. If, for example, downtime can be reduced, then the cost of fuel and lower maintenance bills become far more important metrics when weighing up the choice of a new commercial vehicle. This, said Schep, will be the "game-changer" in the adoption of electric vans.

MARK TISSHAW



Data-led pre-emptive repairs can be carried out by mobile technicians

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Grapevine

MARK TISSHAW

Hans Schep manages Ford's market-leading European van business

FORD HAS BEEN one of the European automotive industry's standout success stories over the past decade, growing its range, customer base, revenues and profitability while maintaining market-share leadership each year.

That is, of course, on the van side of the business. Whatever the woes of Ford's passenger car business, the commercial vehicle arm is doing some quite extraordinary things, with growth that shows no signs of slowing down.

Even after my interview with Ford Pro's European general manager Hans Schep ends, the stats and info keep coming. He is surprised more isn't written about the van industry because, as he says: "This is where the money is made and where the most interesting customer journeys happen." Indeed, if all the European businesses that rely on vans united to form a country, it would be the sixth-largest member state in terms of GDP.

Given its size and scale, and seen alongside the struggles of Ford's passenger car operations in Europe, Ford Pro is in effect Ford in Europe, dominating volumes, revenues and profits (Ford doesn't split this out, but nobody at the company suggests otherwise). It is no doubt the "key business" for Ford in Europe on that front. "That's clear," says Schep.

Cars are always going to get the headlines, but it's the vans that really excite the boardrooms. Jim Farley, now Ford's global CEO, appointed Schep to lead Ford's commercial vehicle operations in 2016, before it was spun out and renamed Ford Pro in 2021.

"Jim says his favourite vehicle is a white van," says Schep. "He's a great supporter of Ford Pro. He knew it needed a dedicated company; he saw the opportunity early on."

In many ways the van market is more mature than the car side, and it is ahead in several key areas 'our' side of the business would do well to learn from.

An ability to sell extra products and services on an ongoing subscription basis is one, increasing a "share of wallet", as Schep calls it. That might be a harder sell to car buyers, but offering an easier way to service and maintain vehicles, be it through remote servicing or using the car's on-board diagnostics to proactively report issues and fix them before they go wrong, could appeal to private buyers.

Schep calls service intervals "a clunky way" of looking after vehicles, and that extends to dealer visits themselves. I suggest that pre-emptively stopping bad things happening before they actually do sounds like the Tom Cruise film Minority Report.

"Yes, absolutely!" he replies. "You're spending multiple tens of thousands of pounds on a good, something goes wrong with it, you have to take it back and maybe you get it back on the same day? You can buy an ice cream online now and it will be with you in 10 minutes."

"In many ways, the van market is more mature than the car side"

BMW REVISITS SHOOTING BRAKE WITH £430K SPEEDTOP

M8 Competition-based concept set for production as limited-run model

BMW has morphed the M8 Competition into a two-seat shooting brake for a special limited-run concept called the Speedtop.

Unveiled at the Villa d'Este concours, the wagon has been given a complete design overhaul compared with the car on which it is based, and it is set to be built in a small batch "for collectors and enthusiasts". Each example is expected to cost as much as £430,000.

The Speedtop is closely related to the Skytop that was unveiled at the same event last year. BMW is positioning the new concept as a modern interpretation of the traditional shooting brake – a format it has revisited several times over the years, with production cars such as the Z3 Coupé and Z4 Coupé, as well as 2023's Z4-based Touring Coupé concept.

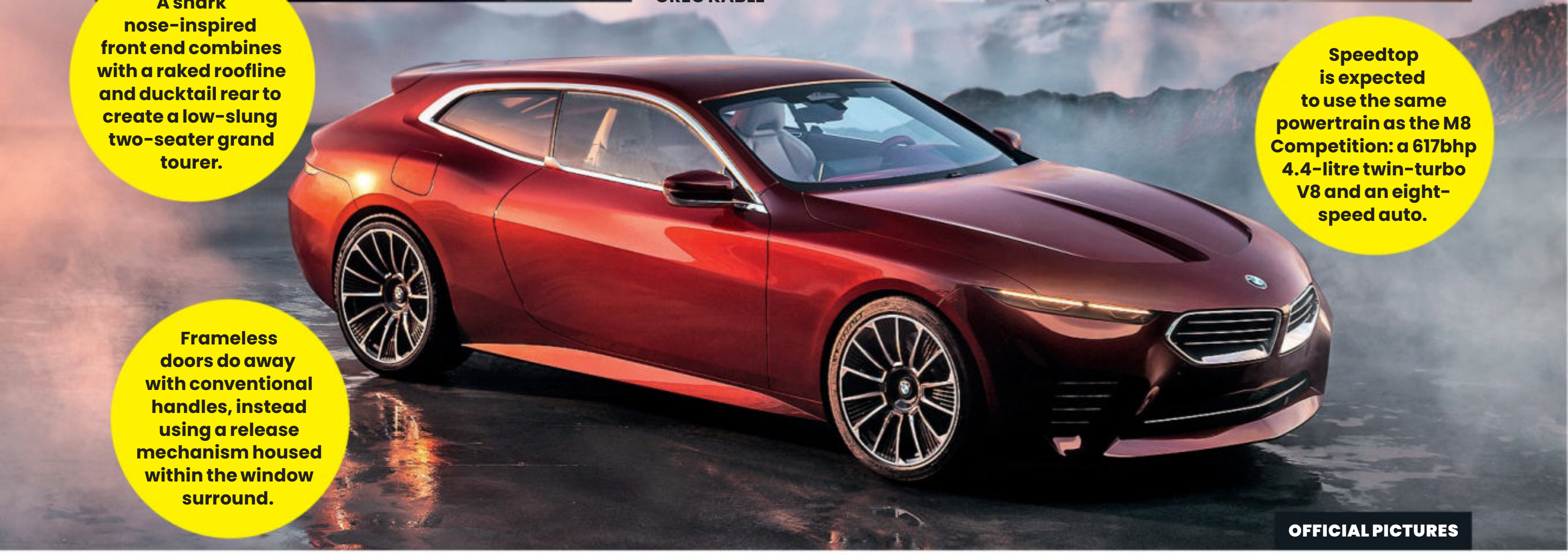
"The BMW Concept Speedtop forms an intentional counterpoint to our current [production] models," said BMW Group design chief Adrian van Hooydonk.

Production numbers, although not confirmed, are expected to match the Skytop's 50-unit run. Prototypes of that car – which is already sold out – have been spotted testing at the Nürburgring in Germany. BMW has told Autocar that both it and the upcoming Speedtop will be engineered to the same standards as its regular production models.

GREG KABLE

Lack of a B-pillar gives the glasshouse a clean look, while a heavily angled fastback tailgate prioritises design over boot space.

Inside, plush leather trim extends across the dashboard, seats and rooflining. The focus is on craftsmanship and material richness, rather than digital tech.



A shark nose-inspired front end combines with a raked roofline and ducktail rear to create a low-slung two-seater grand tourer.

Speedtop is expected to use the same powertrain as the M8 Competition: a 617bhp 4.4-litre twin-turbo V8 and an eight-speed auto.

Frameless doors do away with conventional handles, instead using a release mechanism housed within the window surround.

OFFICIAL PICTURES

BMW TRIALS SOLID-STATE BATTERY TECH AHEAD OF SCHEDULE

BMW has fitted its i7 saloon with a solid-state battery as it ramps up testing of the next-generation technology.

Engineered with partner Solid Power, the pack uses cells that yield a higher density but are smaller and lighter than those in the lithium ion batteries used by BMW today. In simple terms, this means more energy can be stored in smaller pack sizes.

This prototype pack also uses an adapted version of the current Gen5 architecture (rather than the more advanced Gen6 Neue Klasse), which suggests BMW is evaluating whether today's platforms could be modified to bring the solid-state tech to market more quickly than had been previously thought.

Speaking in February, Martin Schuster, BMW Group's vice-president of next-gen battery tech, said the group was eight years away from needing a solid-state battery option in its EV line-up.

However, he said this new test vehicle demonstrated the group's "technology-open mindset". He added: "We are continuously advancing the development of new battery cell technologies."

BMW said the i7 will be tested over the coming months to gather information on temperature and operating pressure.

MY WEEK IN CARS

Steve Cropley

Audi's Jo Budge knows a Sport from an S Line better than anyone

MONDAY

Ever wondered how exactly configurations and price levels for strong-selling cars are decided? I have, but things are clearer now following an absorbing conversation with Audi UK's Q-model guru, Jo Budge, who has been doing this job on various four-ringed new arrivals for years.

Product managers like her have remarkable clout in deciding what will be offered ("We take a 1000-piece jigsaw and cut it down to 100," she says). They decide on a palette of wheel styles and sizes, colour combinations, powertrains, interior details (audio, instrumentation, trim options, seat styles) and will even invent a new trim (Black Series, say) if a market warrants it. They also decide how to 'bundle' options, a black art if ever there was one, and negotiate hard if the factory is reluctant to make precisely what they want.

What I most enjoyed was hearing that Budge's decisions are based just as much on experience, intuition and constant, personal observation of buyers' preferences (even weekend trips involve eyeballing cars) as on history, such as Brits' well-known preference for high-spec cars.

> **"Much credit is due to Bicester Motion's leadership team"**

Most interesting of all, this job has turned Budge into a true owner's advocate. "We want every car to look as good as it can," she says, "and to have the strongest residual value."

Cropley still has his model Cygnet – and a fondness for the car itself

WEDNESDAY

I can't stop cogitating over my preferred size for a car – which might seem weird for the owner of a 5.4m-long, 2.5-tonne Ford pick-up truck, but I ask you to disqualify that from the discussion. It's my equivalent of others' Ariels and Caterhams, a car whose extraordinary use means it has no bearing on the 'rules'. My vote goes to a VW Golf size: big enough for people and luggage, wieldy enough to be called agile. Even so, driving an Audi A3 this week made me aware that if they make it even a shade bigger, the sainted advantage might disappear. I hope the big guys are aware of that.

THURSDAY

I'm still shocked by the awful events a couple of weekends ago at Bicester Motion, although I'm reassured by the rapid, statesmanlike actions of CEO Dan Geoghegan, who paid moving respect to the three people who died fighting the fire while sounding (as usual) like a man with a plan.

Much credit is also due the Bicester Motion leadership team, who have the sensitive task of respectfully righting the ship. More details of their forward plans will be around by the time you read this, but as I write, many on-site businesses are working again (although a big police presence continues) and public events are likely to start again at the beginning of June.

What a relief to know that a place so many of us have come to view as a home from home is coming back to action, bloodied but unbowed.

FRIDAY

On an inner-London pedestrian crossing, I was nearly flattened by an Aston Martin Cygnet – one of 800 examples of Marek Reichman's brilliantly restyled Toyota iQ made between 2011 and 2013.

Back then the price was £31k, but nowadays you see them offered at £40k (while £4k buys you the world's best iQ). I managed to avoid actual physical contact with the speeding Cygnet but, post-outrage, the experience filled me with nostalgia for this eccentric city car – which the company hoped at the time might become an addition to the options list of grander Astons.

The experience sent me straight home to find the little model that was given to attendees of the Cygnet's London debut – still the coolest launch model I've ever had.

AND ANOTHER THING

I took my Triumph on the recent Distinguished Gentleman's charity ride, not seeking distinction but because this awesome event is so effective it seems wrong not to be involved. Last year, on a single day, 125,000 riders in 108 countries raised £5 million for health charities. It works because nearly every biker is an enthusiast. Imagine the result if the power of car enthusiasts could be harnessed this way.

GET IN TOUCH

steve.cropley@haymarket.com

PRIOR CONVICTION

Matt Prior

'A state of grace': what an elegant way to describe having reached a certain peace of mind. One can imagine a cleric or a wellness guru talking about finding 'a state of grace', an inner calm, as a contemplative or meditative goal.

It was instead a phrase said to me by my colleague Steve Cropley about not wanting any more cars. A curious way to describe not buying another snotbox – but he is a thoughtful man, it should be noted.

If you receive Subscriber Extra, a weekly editorial email sent to Autocar subscribers, you may have read him expanding on this; how he isn't envious of people with large car collections and how there's only one car he regrets selling.

Having a state of grace, as he explained it to me, is owning sufficient cars to do every job you could conceivably want and no more.

There are people, of course, for whom that could be two cars, or one, or even none, in the way that I have achieved a state of grace about the number of pizza ovens or bobbins or lizards I own – none in each case being precisely the optimum amount to satisfy me. I suppose I could own a bobbin or two without it adversely affecting my state of mind, but having more than zero lizards I would find, I think, quite stressful.

For other things, there might not be a firm optimum number. I'm content having three chickens, although I preferred it when there were four of them. The thing about hens is that the number can go down so unexpectedly, depending on the mood of a hen or local predators. You can have four in the morning but the next time you check, one or two fewer. But with a poultry centre half an hour away, it's easy to manage. For me, three or four is 'about right', but I can still achieve a state of grace with two or five and some strong fencing.

Prior's Lambo childhood dream morphed into a VW adult reality

My point is that if you have a little space, it's relatively easy to achieve a state of grace with chickens, bobbins or pizza ovens, if you're an enthusiast of one of those things.

But I'm not sure the same is true with cars for the automotive tragic. They are expensive, need regular maintenance, degrade if neglected and take up a lot of space. As a result, grace is not a state that I've ever quite reached with them.

I'm now closer than I've ever been, probably since I first set eyes on a Lamborghini Countach when I was a kid and the fuse was lit. By the time you have a dozen posters of cars on your bedroom wall, a stack of automotive books and magazines and a clutch of ZX Spectrum driving games, you're in a state of waiting until you can gather, if you ever can, the cars that will do every job you want of them. Or until you accept that there are some you will never have.

> **"It's easy to achieve a state of grace with chickens or bobbins"**

I'm mostly over the Countach thing now and have most of my wants covered. There's the Audi A2 I'm boring everyone about at the moment, which makes such an easy and cute daily driver that I often find myself hopping into it in place of a car that I'm supposed to be driving. My fast road and occasional track-day wants are (or will be) met by a Hillman Imp that's awaiting a BMW bike engine conversion. And I have a Volkswagen Beetle Baja Bug for fun day trips and long-suspension-travel kicks – a cut-price Ariel Nomad. They've cost £8000 between them.

There's an old Land Rover Defender too, once necessary as a tow car, still a daily driver but only around because it's such a family pet that it will probably be bequeathed to the children (by which time I hope it won't face a £735-per-year VED charge). If it wasn't so dear to us, a £2000 pick-up or a Suzuki Jimny, which could have the bonus of being a convertible, could do its job.

For less than £10,000, then, I could have four cars that bring me as close to a state of grace as I think I've ever had: economical and comfortable daily, thrilling driver's car, holiday fun wagon and utility 4x4. Serenity. If I can forget about wanting a V12.

GET IN TOUCH
matthew.prior@haymarket.com

Every petrolhead needs a car specifically for when they're feeling impish

RACING LINES

Damien Smith

Ogier is still a force to be reckoned with – when he decides to show up

Age? It's just a number in modern motorsport. At 41, Sébastien Ogier is a prime example of a decorated legend who simply refuses to lift as he pushes on into his fifth decade. The Frenchman scored a record-extending seventh Rally Portugal victory this month, the 63rd of his stunning World Rally Championship career, as Toyota maintained its unbeaten run in the series this year.

But the eight-time champion required a dose of luck for his second win from just three starts in 2025. Hyundai's Ott Tänak was comfortably the fastest in Portugal and led deep into the penultimate leg on the Saturday, only for power steering failure to leave the Estonian even more monosyllabic than usual. The 2019 champion blitzed across the rough and rutted stages on the final day to take a maximum Super Sunday score, which at least gained him back second place from Kalle Rovanperä, but he came up 8.7sec short on a relieved Ogier.

The victor hinted that perhaps Tänak had pushed too hard in the gruelling conditions, saying: "It was a tough fight with Ott, and I don't think we had the pure speed to win without his issue, but rallying is not only about being quick. There were very rough conditions on the second pass of stages and, with a strong car and a clever approach, we were able to take the opportunity."

FEELING THE HEAT

Elfyn Evans retains a healthy buffer at the top of the WRC standings, but the 36-year-old Brit knew before the start that he would be on the back foot in Portugal. As championship leader, he played road sweeper as the first to run on the long, 10-stage Friday leg, which proved a significant disadvantage. By the end of the weekend, all he had salvaged was a sixth-place finish.

Canary Islands Rally winner Rovanperä's third place means he has closed the gap to 30 points, with Ogier two further back. Tänak remains in touch, another two in arrears, but given Toyota's strength in depth and Ogier's insistence on rallying only part-time, the title is likely to come down to a duel between Evans and Rovanperä.

> **"We lacked the speed, but rallying is not only about being quick"**

After a terrific start to the season, Evans is now feeling the heat with nine rallies still to go. Another hot and rutted gravel rally is next, in Sardinia next week, so the onus is on the four-time WRC runner-up to keep his score ticking over. A non-finish at this stage would be a major blow to his hopes of becoming a world champion for the first time. Hold your nerve, Elfyn.

RUNNING AWAY WITH IT

Meanwhile, a British world champion is starting to look a near certainty in Formula E, thanks to the scintillating form of Oliver Rowland. The Nissan ace has a giant 77-point lead over Pascal Wehrlein, Porsche's reigning champion, ahead of the Shanghai double-header this weekend, thanks to a second place and a win in Tokyo. Such margins are far from typical in this deeply competitive series, and Rowland deserves huge credit for his achievements so far in 2025 – even by those who still love to hate Formula E.

Rowland took a fourth ePrix win of the season in Japan

Heavy rain hit Tokyo on day one, forcing the cancellation of qualifying, which meant the points leader started from pole position. But in the race, Rowland was undercut by a clever move from Maserati's Stoffel Vandoorne.

"It was a bold and aggressive strategy to burn a lot of energy at the beginning so we could open our pit window early," the Belgian explained.

Taking his dose of pit boost before a red flag interruption lifted Vandoorne into a comfortable lead and even a quick half-spin couldn't thwart his first win since 2022. Meanwhile, Rowland fended off McLaren youngster Taylor Barnard to finish runner-up.

The following day in the dry, Rowland again started from pole and came back from dropping as low as sixth to score a fabulous fourth win of the campaign. The 32-year-old thought he had blown it on strategy over the mandatory double dose of Attack Mode power boost, saying: "I didn't do a good job on the first Attack Mode and regretted being stuck further down the field, so I knew I had to take a risk when using the final six minutes. I felt like I'd been undercut so went early, and it paid off, as we got back into the lead."

His tight pass on Wehrlein and then his cool defence under extreme pressure was a huge home-win payback for Nissan, which has been the class of the field this term.

After China, Formula E will travel to Jakarta in Indonesia, then return to Europe for a double-header in Berlin before the two-race season climax in London. The Excel centre on 26-27 July will be the place to be to surely witness Rowland's crowning glory.

YOUR VIEWS

WRITE TO autocar@haymarket.com

Letter of the week

WE DON'T NEED TELLING

I was chuffed to see Matt Prior's piece on his Audi A2 in the 7 May issue ('This was the future once'). As Matt said, people like to talk about the A2, so I thought I would share our experience.

My wife drives a 2004 1.4-litre petrol, bought new, still with just 40,000 miles. It has never missed a beat over the 21 years. The only problems have been two cracked windscreens. Cracks appeared at the screen's base on the passenger side. My suspicion was worn rivets in the large pivot for the wiper blade. A new wiper arm fixed it – but wiper arms for right-hand-drive A2s are like hen's teeth. CF Automotive supplied a refurb. The only sign of age is peeling/flaking lacquer (it's red), which has required a respray of the bonnet and a front wing.

For us, it's a keeper. Thanks for highlighting it as a modern-day classic. I look forward to regular updates.

Incidentally, the rest of our fleet are an Alfa Romeo Giulia, to keep up with the times, and a Fiat Barchetta, for when the sun comes out.

John Quilliam, Dublin, Ireland

'RING RECORD RIDE

It was great to hear that Matt Prior has managed to 'steal' an Audi A2. I've admired them for years but never had the circumstances to make one fit my lifestyle.

I've only been in one once. It was around 2001, but it was at the Nordschleife. It was a typically grim, damp, foggy early morning and the A2 was one of few cars circulating. I asked the driver if I could hop in for a passenger lap and we were off. It was a diesel (a 1.2, I think), and we shot off as fast as was mechanically possible. The pilot mentioned that he was the fastest car on the track at the time, due to the poor conditions. Everyone else was tip-toeing around in Porsche 911s and other high-end machinery as we scythed past at maximum attack – for an A2 diesel…

We arrived back in the car park probably nine or 10 minutes later completely unscathed. Seconds later, he was off again on another mission. A memory to cherish.

Leigh Whitchurch
Via email

PARADISE LOST

I loved Matt Prior's article about his Audi A2. The A2, plus the Toyota Prius, Mk1 Mercedes A-Class and BMW i3, demonstrates convincingly what car manufacturers can innovatively achieve completely by themselves with zero government groupthink interference.

There was a sales issue with the Audi, Mercedes and BMW, unfortunately, but 25 years on from the 899kg, 60mpg A2, can you imagine what the fourth-generation A2 would be capable of today in terms of fuel efficiency; extremely low pollution; zero or minimal use of scarce minerals; probably 100% recyclable; with zero weight issues for bridges, multi-storey car parks, motorway safety barriers et al; and probably taking up only two-thirds or less space in the supermarket car park? What's not to like?

Legislation should have simply set gradual, annually reducing pollution and fossil fuel usage standards for manufacturers to achieve as an average across their model ranges. With their proven, limitless innovation, Western Europe's total vehicle fleet would now be just as efficient in every regard – or perhaps even more so – than where we are now and where we are headed. God help us.

Adrian Jackson
Darlington, County Durham

SECOND BITE OF A CHERY

Having borrowed a Jaecoo 7 for two weeks, I can say Matt Saunders' criticism (Testing, testing, 9 April) was overblown and inaccurate.

Yes, to comply with regulations, you have to turn off the ADAS every time you get in, but for this – and for many other functions, such as the air-con – there are shortcuts. Adjusting the heating on the move takes a second and isn't distracting. And Matt was clearly looking at the wrong setting for the odometer. It does record every mile travelled; there are separate modes that break down the total into EV miles, ICE miles and hybrid miles travelled.

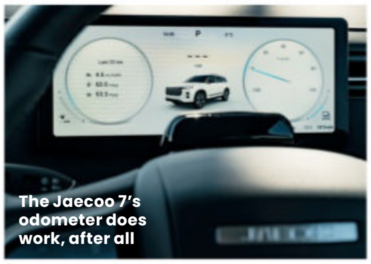
After a good time spent behind the wheel, I was impressed. I don't recognise the car in his article at all.

'Octavio Skoda'
Via autocar.co.uk

Apologies for the error. I'd still make the point that an odometer should be a permanently displayed part of any instrument display, even if it's not mandatory (which it isn't) – MS

Haval is yet another new name for British car buyers to learn

What if the A2 had never gone out of production?



The Jaecoo 7's odometer does work, after all

TIT FOR TAT

Alan Blyth's letter (7 May) about his Land Rover dealer servicing issues struck a familiar chord. I've had various Land Rovers and all share two overriding similarities: they are great cars and the main dealers are appalling. The whole aftersales experience isn't worth the blow-by-blow account, but thank goodness for the small independent garage I now use.

To make me feel better, I did something I would never have done: signed up to the diesel emissions litigation against Land Rover. If they treat me badly, I treat them badly.

Derek Redfern
Fleet, Hampshire

SATURATION POINT

When I was a lad, in the late 1960s, I remember new car showrooms springing up when the Japanese brands started to catch on: Toyota, Datsun, Colt, Mazda. The cars were relatively popular; you would see them everywhere. But is there room in the market for the seemingly constant influx of Chinese cars to our shores today?

I'm now confused as hell, because every other month I hear of a new manufacturer. Just yesterday I passed a dealership that was removing its used stock to make way for Haval – the Haval Jolion Pro, to be precise. WTF? Adding to the confusion, it looked no different to many other Chinese brands. In fact, it looked little different from products being displayed from many of the more established garages surrounding it.

And on top of all that there is now something that has links to JLR – a Freelander that isn't a Land Rover Freelander but was designed by the guy who designed the Land Rover Freelander. Talk about a Chinese puzzle!

I reckon that in 10 years' time, our car market is going to look very different, because so many manufacturers basically selling the same car can't possibly survive.

Scotty
Via autocar.co.uk

Haval is an SUV-focused sub-brand of GWM, sitting beside Ora of Funky Cat fame. We recently drove the Jolion Pro and will publish a review soon – KC

HIRE STANDARDS

It was interesting to read your 7 May news article on car rental companies' experience of EVs.

Following damage to my wife's Volkswagen ID 3 in a car park this month, our insurer has supplied a replacement EV from Enterprise while ours is in for repair. It's a 72-reg Hyundai Kona Electric and clearly not something Enterprise's team know much about.

After the rather sexist response to my wife that the small-battery model would suit, as "she would only be running around locally", when we actually do nearer 15,000 miles per annum, it was supplied with a Nissan-branded, domestic three-point plug lead! Fortunately I had a spare Type 2 lead in the garage.

The staff had no idea that to prolong battery life, an 80% or 90% charge is recommended, rather than 100%. Nor did they know enough to explain where to find regen settings in the car's screen menu (I suspect because they didn't know what that was!), so it's all down to the customer.

While they provided polite and helpful service on one level (picking up from the bodyshop was welcome), surely it isn't beyond the wit of large rental companies to train their staff on the models they hire out? Or even the basics of EVs?

On a positive note, the Kona has proved very economical, with well over 4mpkWh being achieved regardless of how it is driven.

David Driscoll
Norwich

Weekly winner

Letter of the week wins this ValetPro exterior protection and maintenance kit worth £48

GREAT REASONS TO BUY

Next week's issue

ON SALE 4 JUNE

GROUP TEST

THE LEAST LIKELY TEST OF 2025

Three new diesels pitted against each other? Yes, really. Belters too: BMW Alpina D4 S, Range Rover Sport and Mercedes-Benz E450d Estate

FEATURE

LAPPING LE MANS… IN A PEUGEOT E-3008

What's the famous track like from a driver's point of view? Peugeot hypercar star Paul di Resta gives us a slow-speed tour

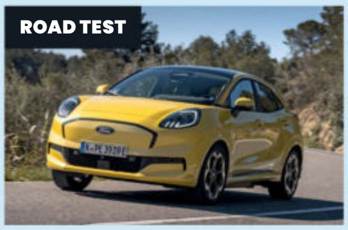
INSIGHT

INSIDE THE WORLD'S LARGEST CAR FACTORY

We visit Hyundai's staggering Ulsan plant in South Korea

EVERY WEEK

ROAD TEST



FORD PUMA GEN-E

Britain's best-selling car arrives in electric form for the ultimate test

LIVING WITH AN…

MG CYBERSTER

Matt Prior welcomes MG's exciting vision of a modern-day sports car: a 503bhp EV

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The original car magazine, published since 1895 'in the interests of the mechanically propelled road carriage'

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FIRST DRIVES

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HOW WE TEST CARS

Autocar delivers several kinds of reviews on new cars, with different levels of technical and functional scrutiny. As the name suggests, our First Drives section typically addresses cars that we're driving for the first time - either in final production form or as late prototypes. Time in the car can be limited here, technical and equipment specification might not be finalised and some systems software may not be to production specification. For those reasons, First Drive reports don't have star ratings.

Once we have driven a car for a second time in the UK, in right-hand-drive form and typically at greater length, we will rate it, either as part of a shorter UK test report or as the subject of a full, instrumented Road Test.

In the latter case, we take empirical performance and refinement benchmarks from it at Horiba MIRA proving ground, as well as subjective limit handling impressions, plus key measurements of practicality, efficiency and kerb weight.

All UK tests and Road Tests receive proper verdicts with star ratings informed by everything we have learned and the combined impressions and experience of several testers.

TESTED 21.5.25, ROME, ITALY **ON SALE** JUNE

BYD DOLPHIN SURF

Is this the £18,000 city car that will switch Europe's urbanites on to electric mobility? Don't bet against it

It was always expected that truly cheap cars would be the most difficult to electrify. Some people even feared it might be impossible. Indeed, while 60% of E-segment cars sold in Europe at present are electrified, just 9% of A-segment cars are. But the new BYD Dolphin Surf is billed as the car to end that discrepancy – and given we're talking about the world's leading maker of electrified vehicles, and prices are expected to start at only around £18k, there is a great amount of credibility to that claim.

You might recognise the Dolphin Surf as the BYD Seagull – an EV that recorded almost half a million sales in its first year in showrooms. The resemblance of its 'face' to that of a seagull dive-bombing to steal your chips is no coincidence – and that negative association is why the name has been changed over here. As for the new one? The first half draws an obvious link to the larger electric hatchback that BYD sells; the second half is intended to give the car a fun, zesty, youthful image. It's not a mere rebadging, by the way: at 3990mm, the Surf is actually slightly longer than the Seagull, its overhangs having been extended to improve crash safety.

The few previous attempts at an affordable A-segment EV have produced acceptable enough but rather cheap-feeling results in the Dacia Spring and Leapmotor T03. The Surf is intended to feel entirely like a 'proper' car while being no more expensive than those rivals. As such, it's based on the same e-Platform 3.0 that underpins the deeply impressive Seal electric saloon, which incorporates BYD's cutting-edge Blade Battery technology (it's said to be safer and more durable than rival batteries and features no rare cobalt), and uses BYD's 'eight-in-one' electric powertrain, ▸

TESTER'S NOTE
The boss of the steering wheel is a large disc of shiny black plastic, which daylight turns into a kind of smoky make-up mirror. **KC**

> **"The various old Fiats in Rome had absolutely zero chance of stealing ahead of me during my test drive"**

◂ which improves efficiency and saves space by combining the motor, reducer, charger, DC converter, power distribution box, battery management controller, vehicle control unit and motor controller.

There are two variations of the lithium-iron-phosphate battery on offer in the Surf, with usable capacities of 30kWh and 43.2kWh and maximum rapid-charging rates of 65kW and 85kW. That's far from the fastest on the market, but then they're also far from the biggest.

The smaller battery is paired with an 87bhp motor in the Active model for a 137-mile range and an 11.1sec 0-62mph time. The larger battery is teamed with the same motor for a 200-mile range and a 12.1sec time in the Boost model, or with a 154bhp motor for a 193-mile range and a 9.1sec time in the rather confusingly named Comfort model, which we're driving here.

This puts the Surf far ahead of the Spring (140 miles) and T03 (165 miles) and roughly on par with the ë-C3 – despite its pricing being in line with the first two, rather than the Citroën.

Standard equipment is generous as well. The T03 feels quite basic inside in comparison to the Surf and its large, Apple CarPlay-equipped touchscreen, array of attractive, soft-feeling materials and faux-leather sports seats.

You can then add 15in alloy wheels, rear parking sensors, a parking camera, keyless entry and adaptive cruise control to the count – plus, uniquely in this segment, vehicle-to-load capability (meaning the battery can power external devices, such as camping gear) and NFC locking (allowing you to use your phone or smartwatch instead of the key fob and even send digital key copies to friends and family).

Step up to the Boost model for larger (16in) alloys, electric seat adjustment and automatic wipers; and to the Comfort for a 360deg camera, LED headlights, tinted rear windows, heated front seats and a wireless phone-charging pad.

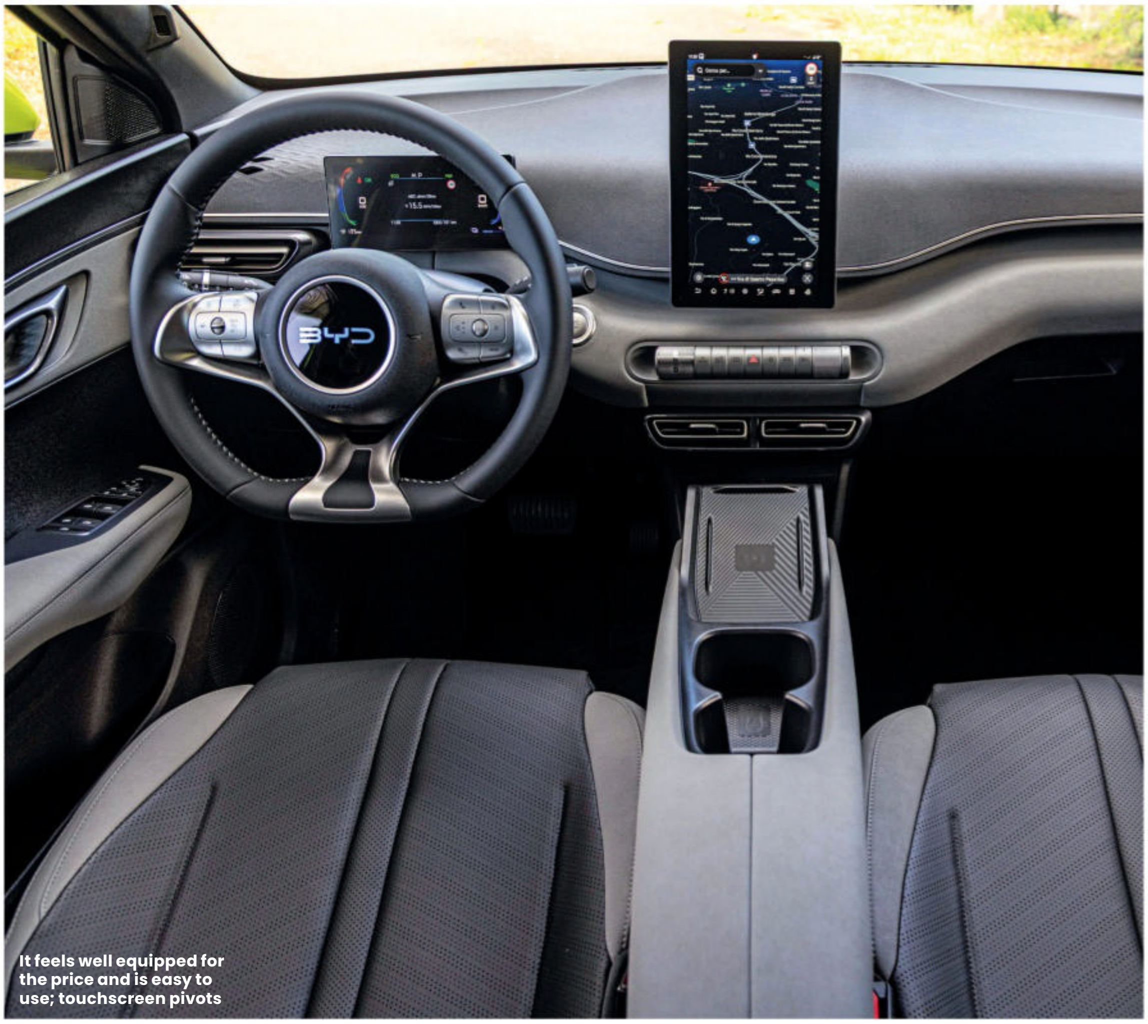
The practicality of this interior also impresses. Two average-sized adults can fit in the rear (albeit strictly two; as in the T03, there is no middle seat), the boot capacity matches that of the ë-C3 almost exactly (308 litres versus 310 litres) and there's plenty of oddment storage.

The touchscreen infotainment system will be familiar to anyone who has ever sat in another BYD (complete with the capacity to rotate between landscape and portrait orientation), which means it's well equipped and relatively easy to navigate but perhaps a little too demanding of someone who is meant to be driving.

Commendably, there is a row of physical buttons on the dashboard to complement those on the steering wheel (which control the adaptive cruise control and media). The silver plastic switches control the gears (tap the left side to engage park), driving modes, air-con and ventilation. Annoyingly, however, that last one simply turns the fan on or off; to adjust its intensity, you have to tap the permanent but small shortcut icon bar at the bottom of the touchscreen. It's also odd that the temperature is measured not in Celsius but undefined numbers (one is the minimum and 11 about the middle).

You might fairly wonder whether this is a case of BYD chucking in all the goodies in an attempt to compensate for a fundamentally underwhelming product. After all, the driving experiences offered by the company's UK-market cars have been curiously hit and miss: whereas the Seal is supple and

Urban driving suits it best but it's quiet and capable on motorways



It feels well equipped for the price and is easy to use; touchscreen pivots

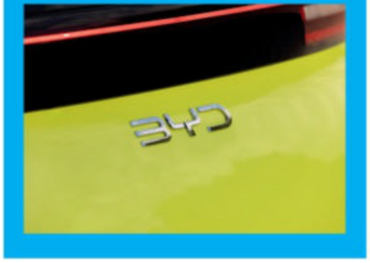
A EUROPEAN CAR FOR EUROPEANS

BYD is initially producing the Dolphin Surf in China, but before long production of European-market models will be resited to the company's new-build factory in Szeged, southern Hungary, which is "expected to create thousands of local jobs".

This will make the Surf one of the very first Chinese cars built in Europe, after Leapmotor reneged on its plan to produce European-market T03s at the Stellantis site in Tychy, Poland.

BYD already sells cars in 28 European countries, 12 of those being new to it in 2025.

"Compact cars are the next frontier for electrification in Europe," BYD executive vice-president Stella Li told us in Rome, "and our goal is for customers to think of BYD as a European brand."



engaging, the Seal U suffers from vague steering and overly soft suspension. Well, the Surf falls somewhere in the middle of those two descriptions.

In urban environments, where it will spend most of its time, it's excellent. Suspension that's on the softer side gives it a generally comfortable and composed ride, even if it does struggle to deal with ripples and potholes. The powertrain is likewise smooth, and the extra power of the Comfort model meant the various old Fiats that make up Roman traffic had absolutely zero chance of stealing ahead of me during my test drive. If anything, it's a bit too much: floor the accelerator and the Hankook tyres will often scrabble as they're overloaded with instant torque.

The steering, meanwhile, has a nice medium weighting to it in Normal mode – there's also a Sport mode, but the difference is hardly noticeable – and the springy self-centring works well in traffic.

Interestingly, the regenerative braking is weak even when put into its Strong mode (as with the steering, changed via a sub-menu on the touchscreen) so one-pedal driving is an impossibility. Whether that's a good or bad thing will be a matter of taste. Personally, I rather liked the faintly old-school experience of pivoting my right foot.

Get onto faster roads and the dynamic appeal of the Surf diminishes notably. The handling offers no interest to the keen driver; the body control feels loose as you tackle the bends of a faster country road; the sports seat's bolsters fail to stop you rocking from side to side; and the character of the steering now serves to hamper your confidence. A Renault 5 the Surf certainly isn't.

At least the car doesn't feel out of place on the motorway, where it will cruise along in comfort and admirable quietness (you do hear some wind noise at times but only because there's no engine noise) with plenty of power in reserve for swift overtakes.

After a day of driving in a variety of scenarios, our car's digital instrument readout reported overall energy efficiency of 4.8mpkWh – a figure that, amazingly, equates to a range (207 miles) that is actually longer, not shorter, than the official figure. Of course, that won't be repeatable in the gloomier climate of Britain, but it bodes very well indeed.

BYD boss Stella Li described the Surf to us as "the car for everyone" and I'd agree that it should appeal to a great many people. It may be no dynamic wonder, and it may lack the retro chic of the Renault 5, but it is an attractive, generously equipped, practical EV that offers an agreeable range at a keen price – an amount of money that will otherwise only get you something that feels significantly less mature.

KRIS CULMER

Boot is a useful 308 litres; the two rear seats fold individually as well

TECH SPEC

BYD DOLPHIN SURF COMFORT

Urban EV with a mature feel. Not perfect but strong value for money. Boost model may be the sweet spot

Price £25,000 (est)
Engine Permanent magnet synchronous motor
Power 154bhp
Torque 229lb ft
Gearbox 1-spd reduction gear, FWD
Kerb weight 1390kg
0-62mph 9.1sec
Top speed 93mph
Battery 43.2kWh (usable)
Range, economy 193 miles, 4.5mpkWh
CO_2, tax band 0g/km, 3%
Rivals Hyundai Inster, Renault 5

TESTED 20.5.25, PORTO, PORTUGAL **DELIVERIES** WINTER

SMART #5

Full-size electric family SUV vies for attention in steroidal Brabus form

Let's get the (not quite so) obvious bits out of the way first: 2165mm, 1720kg and 576bhp.

No, those aren't the headline specs of the new Smart #5 but the differences in overall length, kerb weight and peak power between this new five-up family SUV and the diminutive Fortwo city car that first bore the Smart badge in 1998.

With that car now retired and the #5 on its way to dealerships to join the #1 and #3, Smart has passed the point of no return from a maker of fun-size urban runarounds to a purveyor of premium electric SUVs, with a price bracket that ranges from £32,000 to a mic-drop £50,000-plus. We're not in Hambach any more, Toto.

The 4.7m-long #5, then, is the flagship for this new era, and it is pitched right at the heart of Europe's fastest-growing market segment. Its dimensions and specifications line it up against the Mercedes-Benz EQB, Mini Countryman E and Kia EV6.

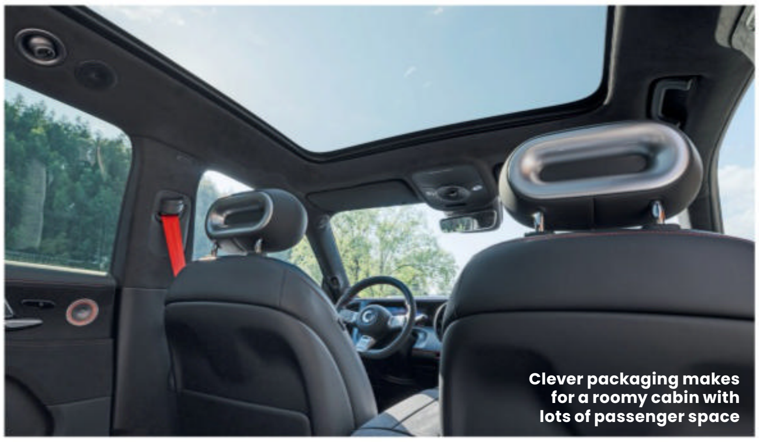
It is rear-wheel drive as standard, producing either 335bhp in entry-level Pro guise – with a 74.4kWh, 400V battery – or 358bhp in Pro+ and Premium specs, which upgrade to a 94kWh, 800V battery that is proven to be capable of charging at a whopping 426kW. A second motor and all-wheel drive comes with the mid-rung Pulse and off-road-ish Summit Edition trim packages, bumping peak output up to a fiery 579bhp. The Brabus flagship, meanwhile, touts a frankly ridiculous 637bhp that's in keeping with the German tuner's reputation as a purveyor of intergalactic 'bahnstormers.

It was this range-topping version we were given to try on the launch in Portugal, with all the options boxes ticked and so in theory giving us the most complete overview of the #5 line-up. That said, our experience of the #1 and #3 Brabus models suggests that the more sedate and efficiency-minded variants will be the sweeter everyday propositions.

That is not least because there is no universe in which your family car needs the nausea-inducing, Lamborghini Urus-baiting 637bhp that this thing sends to both of its axles. Floor it off the line once in full-bore Brabus mode and you won't fancy doing it again.

If you deem the novelty of your family runaround being able to outstrip a BMW M3 Competition at the lights worth the premium and the reduced range (an official 335 miles here plays 366 in the less sprightly four-wheel-drive models), then have at it. But aside from the extra grunt, it is otherwise unmodified – and it feels like an outdated showcase of how chest-thumping power figures do not an engaging EV make.

However – and unlike the other


Clever packaging makes for a roomy cabin with lots of passenger space

smart
BB SE 590E

"The #5 is a relaxed cruiser, which bolsters its appeal as a long-distance family hauler" electric Smart Brabus models – this outrageous firepower doesn't overwhelm what is broadly a comfort-minded and well-rounded engineering package, and in day-to-day driving it's easy to ignore the more uncouth characteristics of this particular variant.

Which is good, because there's much to commend here – not least dynamically. I wouldn't go so far as to paint it as an unlikely B-road hero, but it holds its line with impressive resolve when hurled into a hairpin, even with no trick differential technology or particularly sticky tyres to aid its cause. It even keeps roll remarkably well in check for a heavy high-rider.

You can have your steering either fairly numb in Comfort mode or weirdly over-heavy in Sport, but it's always predictable and quick to respond, making the #5 easy to place and helping to mask its not insignificant footprint.

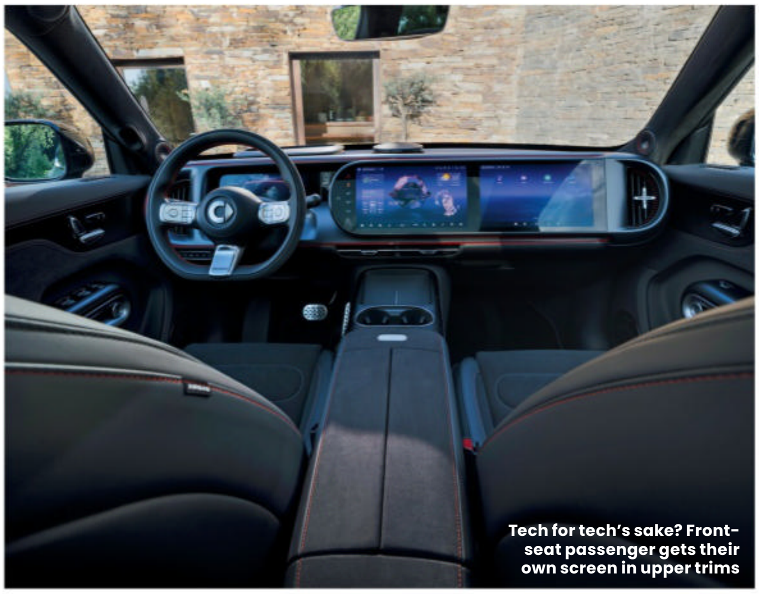
It's a relaxed cruiser, too: this car's whopping 21in alloys aren't especially conducive to a pillowy ride, but even so the #5 put in a good showing over cobblestones, speed bumps and rutted tracks. It nicely isolates the cabin from the worst of the jolts and thuds and generally bolsters its appeal as a long-distance family hauler – a billing the #5 surely merits by dint of its market-leading charging speeds and usefully long range, particularly in sub-Brabus guise.

In many ways, the #5 could not be further removed from the snack-sized Smart cars of yore, but its designers claim to have taken inspiration from the Fortwo's innovative packaging to maximise roominess. With the wheels pushed right to the corners of the body, a totally flat floor and a pleasingly traditional straight-backed silhouette, the #5 has about as cavernous and airy a cabin as its footprint can offer. Boot space (630 litres in the rear, up to 74 in the frunk), head room and oddment storage are all strong suits, and I had a comfortable 20cm of leg room when sat behind my 5ft 10in self's driving position – putting the #5 on a par with cars from the class above for back-seat refinement.

It feels of a higher calibre materially compared with its smaller stablemates, with decently plush materials used for all the main touchpoints and a reassuring sense of solidity to its (admittedly sparse) physical switchgear.

An over-reliance on the 13in touchscreen is an inevitable weak point, but Smart has responded to customer feedback from the earlier cars and made various functions – like the climate stack, ADAS and audio – quicker to access from the home screen, which helps to minimise eyes-off time.

The #5 grips well and steers nicely, and it's easy to place on the road


Tech for tech's sake? Front-seat passenger gets their own screen in upper trims

A same-size touchscreen for the front passenger is standard from Pro+ trim upwards (testament to the influence of Chinese consumer demands), which feels a bit much in a mainstream family crossover. The same goes for the infotainment interfaces more broadly, which have been overly gamified to the extent that customising your settings is akin to creating a player profile on a Nintendo Wii. Once again Smart has seen fit to introduce a digital mascot – this time a lion called Leo – which does the sum total of absolutely nothing.

It's difficult to know how much crossover there is in Europe between people who appreciate this sort of whimsical digitisation and those who are in the market for a £40,000-plus premium SUV – but I'd wager it isn't much.

Overall, though, the #5 feels far more convincing as a 'big Smart car' than the #1 and #3. It is rigidly mainstream in its positioning, but it's refined, cleverly packaged and distinctively styled enough to merit consideration. It looks like pretty good value in terms of its size, technical credentials and equipment levels, too. Think twice about that Countryman.

FELIX PAGE

TESTER'S NOTE

Unlike the new Mercedes CLA, the 800V-equipped #5 is able to charge at 400V chargers. But Smart says these are dying out in Europe, so it has integrated the functionality in such a way that it can be removed easily when no longer needed – which should make the car cheaper to build. **FP**

TECH SPEC

SMART #5 BRABUS

A comfortable, long-legged and technically impressive entrant to a crowded class, but one that doesn't need to be served hot

Price £52,000 (est)
Engine Two permanent magnet synchronous motors
Power 637bhp
Torque 524lb ft
Gearbox 1-spd reduction gear, 4WD
Kerb weight 2378kg
0-62mph 3.8sec
Top speed 130mph
Battery 100/94kWh (total/usable)
Range, economy 335 miles, 3.6mpkWh
CO_2, tax band 0g/km, 3%
Rivals Skoda Enyaq vRS, Ford Mustang Mach-E GT, Tesla Model Y Performance

TESTER'S NOTE
Fiat will also launch a Grande Panda featuring a pure-petrol engine and a six-speed manual gearbox. This isn't confirmed for the UK, though, largely because of the extra cost already incurred by conversions to right-hand drive. **JA**

TESTED 20.5.25, TURIN, ITALY **DELIVERIES** SEPTEMBER

FIAT GRANDE PANDA HYBRID

Quasi-rugged retro throwback gets petrol-electric powertrain option

Has the trend for retro-fuelled comebacks gone too far? Based on the Fiat Grande Panda Hybrid launch event, I'd say yes, it has. Not because of the car itself, you understand. Instead, someone within Fiat has clearly been listening to Now! 32 and decided it would be a great idea to ask Shaggy to re-record his 1990s hit Boombastic, except retitled – wait for it – Pandastic. And no, I'm not making that up.

Thankfully, the Grande Panda is a far more welcome revival than that wretched tune that is now embedded in my head. We first sampled the raised hatchback in its pure-electric form but, as with other cars on Stellantis's cost-conscious Smart Car platform, it can accept a hybrid powertrain: a 1.2-litre three-cylinder turbocharged petrol engine aided by a 29bhp electric motor mounted in the six-speed dual-clutch gearbox.

Aside from the engine noise, the only way you would notice this isn't the battery-only version from outside is the small 'hybrid' logo on the boot. Which is fine, because the Grande Panda remains a fantastic piece of nostalgic yet fresh design. The interior is essentially unchanged, and there's still delight in spotting details like the Lingotto-inspired infotainment surround.

Our top-spec £21,035 La Prima test car featured a Bambox dashboard, made from a fabric featuring 33% recycled bamboo – because pandas like bamboo, obviously. It's actually quite stylish and pleasant to touch, so it works beyond the tenuous link.

La Prima cars also gain parking sensors, a rear-view camera, heated front seats, roof rails and 17in alloys. I'd question if it was worth the extra over entry-level £18,035 Pop trim, which has most of the tech you'll want and the retro joy of riding on 16in steelies.

With no underfloor batteries, the hybrid offers slightly more rear leg room than the EV. It's not exactly limo-like, but for a sub-four-metre car, rear passengers should be happy enough. The 412-litre boot is a welcome 51 litres bigger.

The hybrid clearly can't match the EV when it comes to smooth power delivery or instant pick-up. It's quicker on the 0-62mph sprint, although we're talking 10sec rather than 11. Still, the engine delivers its 109bhp pretty smoothly, while the claimed 55.4mpg economy seems achievable in the real world.

The Grande Panda's short wheelbase and relatively low 1380kg kerb weight give plenty of dynamic pep, and the well-weighted steering provides a good deal of confidence behind the wheel. For a relatively small car it rides well, too: you'll feel big imperfections in the road, but the suspension soaks up smaller bumps with aplomb. It's pretty fun.

For all the Grande Panda's charm, there are some niggles. Like Shaggy, the engine can get a little raspy if too much is asked of it, and hard acceleration can leave the wheels scrabbling for traction, especially on damp roads.

I found the accelerator pedal was too close to the footwell side and, as in other Smart Car models such as the Vauxhall Frontera, the information in the driver display is minimal to a fault. The mandated driver safety warning bongs are particularly loud and annoying, too.

Such faults might grate more over extended use, but it's hard not to forgive them given the charm of the Grande Panda. People not ready to go electric will find plenty to like with this hybrid version: it's enjoyable, affordable and upbeat motoring. In fact, and I really do hate myself for writing this, it actually is pretty darn Pandastic. Curse you, Shaggy.

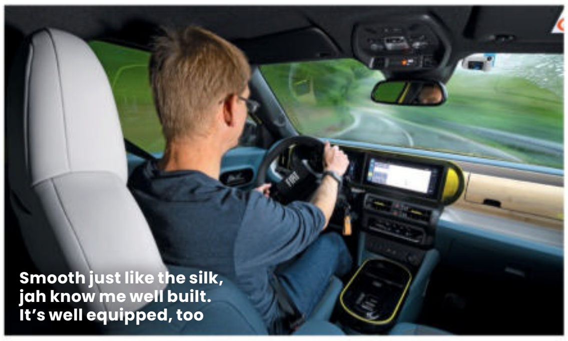
JAMES ATTWOOD

TECH SPEC

FIAT GRANDE PANDA HYBRID LA PRIMA

A fuss-free, simple and cost-effective city car wrapped up in a superbly charming package

Price £21,035
Engine 3 cyls, 1199cc, turbocharged, petrol, plus electric motor
Power 109bhp
Torque 170lb ft
Gearbox 6-spd dual-clutch automatic, FWD
Kerb weight 1380kg
0-62mph 10.0sec
Top speed 99mph
Economy 55.4mpg
CO_2, tax band 119g/km, 29%
Rivals Citroën C3, Dacia Duster



Smooth just like the silk, jah know me well built. It's well equipped, too

Grande Panda steers nicely and rides well for a car of its size

TESTED 21.5.25, BADEN-WURTTEMBERG, GERMANY **DELIVERIES** JUNE

PEUGEOT E-3008 DUAL MOTOR

Electric family SUV now offers four-wheel drive and more than 300bhp

Four-wheel drive in this instance doesn't equate to unflappable traction

Chassis and steering don't encourage quick cornering

The Peugeot 3008 SUV is riding on a wave of success in Europe, with 130,000 examples sold across the continent and the electric e-3008 taking almost 25% of those. And now, for those potential buyers feeling left out because they want or need four-wheel drive, Peugeot has added a dual-motor version with more than 300bhp.

The standard e-3008 is powered by a single front-mounted motor that makes 211bhp and 254lb ft for 0-62mph in 8.8sec. The new dual-motor variant puts out 321bhp and 375lb ft, cutting the sprint time to a fairly impressive 6.0sec.

That trumps the Skoda Enyaq 85x Coupé (6.7sec) but is still some way adrift of the Tesla Model Y Dual Motor (just 4.6sec).

Indeed, the addition of a 110bhp motor onto the e-3008's rear axle doesn't seem to have dramatically improved performance.

In Normal mode (in which torque is limited to 331lb ft), the new Dual Motor car is pleasant to punt around in, but jump on the throttle and there's a brief delay before the power kicks in.

Switching to Sport mode (which splits the power 60:40 front to rear and unlocks all the torque) enlivens things somewhat, but while it's linear and brisk for a car with a 2262kg kerb weight, there's little character or excitement about this drivetrain.

Peugeot has also added a 4WD mode, which splits power 50:50 between the front and rear axles for improved traction. The car is quite sprightly therein, but there's plenty of heave under load and in some instances the front wheels scrabble for traction.

The additional grunt has done little to enhance the e-3008's dynamic capabilities either. The chassis lacks the agility and engagement to go with the extra power, which means that when pushing on through a selection of corners, there's plenty of body roll as the car fights against its 2.2-tonne weight and high profile. This isn't helped by the uncommunicative steering, which feels over-assisted and too keen to self-centre.

That being said, if you exercise restraint, the Dual Motor e-3008 has the same moochability as the single-motor car and is generally agreeable to drive around town.

It's pliant and comfortable, albeit with a bit of fuss and fidget that's more detectable at higher speeds. Sharp edges and potholes conspire to upset the ride quality around town, but overall it's comfortable and inoffensive.

Inside, there's good visibility, the front seats offer excellent levels of comfort and adjustability and the technology on offer is fairly easy to get along with. Material quality is good, so it feels upmarket inside.

Power is drawn from the same 73kWh (usable capacity) battery as in the basic e-3008, but range drops from 326 to 303 miles. You can have a single-motor car with a larger 96.9kWh battery for a 435-mile range, but unusually you can't get this in a dual-motor version.

Efficiency officially stands at 3.6mpkWh, but I typically saw only around 3.1mpkWh on a long journey through the Black Forest.

Prices aren't yet confirmed, but Peugeot has suggested that the Dual Motor could start from anywhere between £54,000 and £57,000. That would make it dearer than both the range-topping Model Y (£51,990) and the racy Enyaq Coupé vRS (£53,560), both of which can go farther on a charge and are quicker.

It would be hard to recommend this car over those two rivals in that scenario, and indeed over the equivalent-trim single-motor e-3008 GT, which costs £49,340.

SAM PHILLIPS

TECH SPEC

PEUGEOT E-3008 325PS DUAL MOTOR LAUNCH EDITION

Lacks the sporting character, pace and range to warrant its expected premium over the single-motor car

Price £55,000 (est)
Engine Permanent magnet synchronous motor
Power 321bhp
Torque 375lb ft
Gearbox 1-spd reduction gear, 4WD
Kerb weight 2262kg
0-62mph 6.0sec
Top speed 112mph
Battery 73kWh (usable)
Range, economy 303 miles, 3.6mpkWh
CO_2, tax band 0g/km, 3%
Rivals Skoda Enyaq Coupé, Tesla Model Y

TESTER'S NOTE

The bigger, seven-seat e-5008 has also gained this powertrain. While punchier than the single-motor car, it's 146kg heavier and won't do 300 miles on a charge. **SP**

UK VERDICTS

TESTED 27.5.25, COTSWOLDS **DELIVERIES** NOW

MINI JCW ELECTRIC

Halo hot hatchback embraces battery power for even more punch

Transfixing on the weight figure of a newly launched EV is surely a hiding to nothing. They're all broadly guilty of it, so why care? But when a new Mini hot hatchback carries even 1725kg before the driver has climbed in, it's hard not to fret for its dynamism. The current-generation BMW M3 has received criticism for similar mass, while a Nismo GT-R is a few bags of sugar lighter. Both pack big engines and exhaustive tech into their much larger bodies.

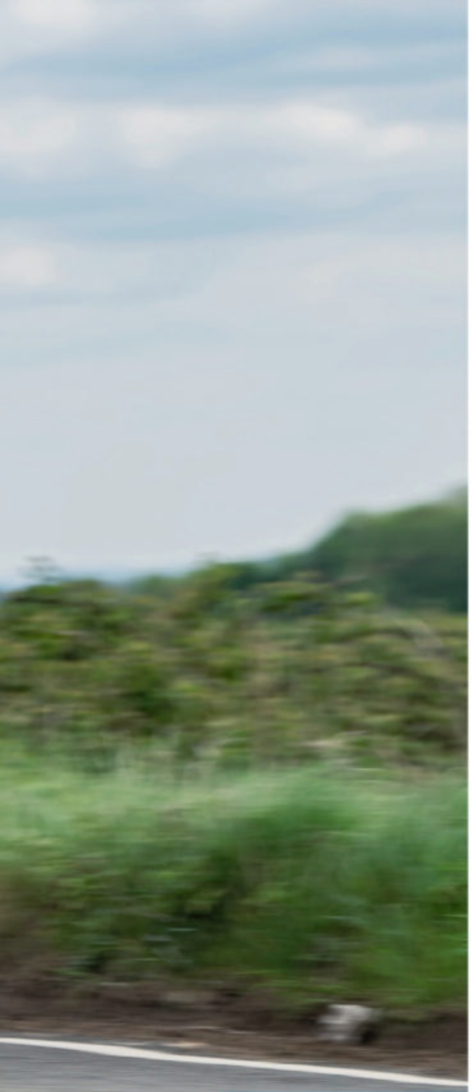
The John Cooper Works Electric is the first pure-electric halo Mini hatch, and it arrives with reasonable potency. Its 255bhp and 258lb ft peaks drive the front wheels for 0-62mph in 5.9sec; the latest petrol JCW is 320kg lighter but 0.2sec slower. A 49.2kWh (usable capacity) battery combines with claimed 4.1mpkWh consumption for a WLTP-stamped 230-mile range, while max charging is 95kW.

This JCW gets its own unique suspension set-up, including more negatively cambered front wheels, and forgoes its petrol sibling's adaptive damping to deliver the tenacious responses JCW buyers apparently demand. This has always been a rambunctious little car, a less subtly styled and more sledgehammer way to pick apart a Great British B-road than the Minis beneath it. This first impression suggests nothing has changed.

Heck, this is a firm car, making a meal out of visibly smooth surfaces and betraying every knot, rut and bump with no real end game; on tighter roads it can be a challenge keeping it neatly between the white lines. It's a clenched fist of a car, presumably to keep all of that weight in check, and you may soon pine for a stricter diet regime to tease more nuanced agility from it.

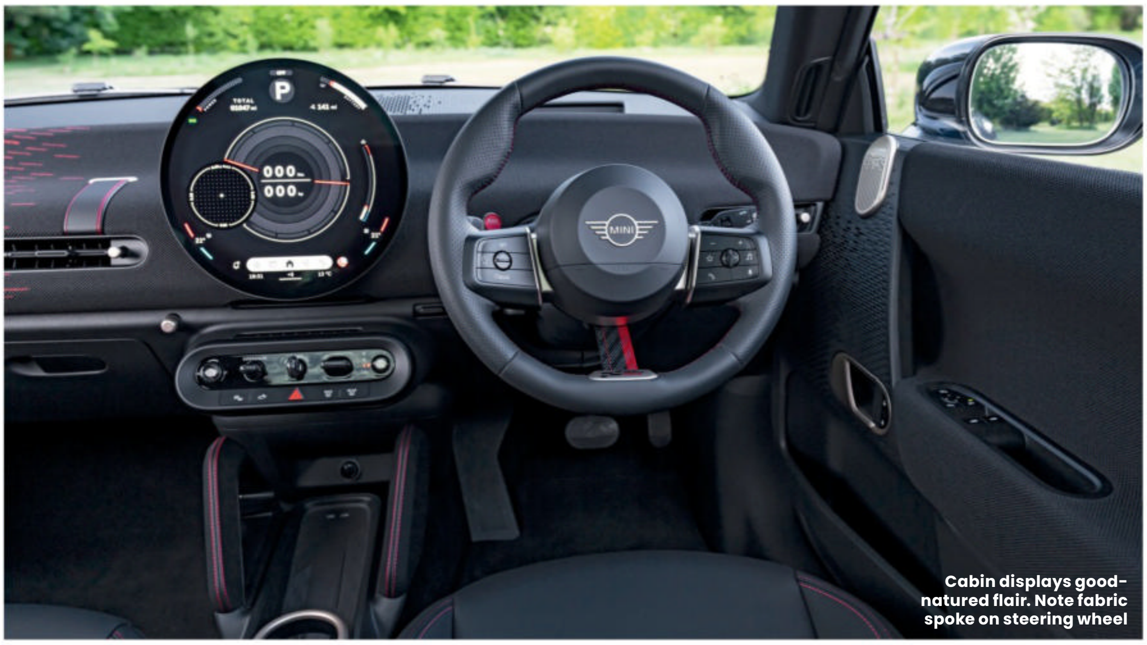
We're familiar with firm performance cars, of course, but the precision and accuracy they chase isn't quite evident here. The JCW Electric is still fun, mind you, but there's little nuance to the ragged thrill of wrestling it through corners. Works Minis were never the most eloquent, of course, and perhaps the experience simply feels disjointed without a

It's firm-riding but fast and responsive. Synthesised sounds aren't half bad either



“This is a clenched fist of a car, presumably to keep all of that weight in check”

The JCW lacks precision, but it’s still fun to drive. And did we say it’s firm?



Cabin displays good-natured flair. Note fabric spoke on steering wheel

TESTER’S NOTE

Its Boost paddle provides another 27bhp for a 10-second hit of acceleration. If you’re in the raciest Go-Kart driving mode, you’ll have the full 255bhp already. **SD**

snorting petrol engine and snicking manual gearbox to mirror the brash responses underneath.

Indeed, there’s a pleasing professionalism to its powertrain. This JCW is fast and urgent in the way you expect of an EV, but there’s a satisfying linearity to its throttle response and some amusing scurries of wheelspin when you go looking for them. Its trick of combining a vigorous kick of electric torque with sustained and involving acceleration is a neat one. Speed continues to build beyond 60mph, making rural overtakes a doddle, and this might even make a great little track toy if such endeavours wouldn’t leave you twiddling your thumbs while it charged for the journey home.

Praise for its synthesised sound, too, which complements the swell of pace well and injects some amusing ‘wap-wap-wap’ overrun into sudden lifts of throttle. It anchors you into the powertrain nicely, which should always be the main purpose of these systems, while entertaining in that chintzy Mini way. Crucially, you miss it when it’s turned off. We scored 3.5mpkWh without much sop to smooth progress too, suggesting you’ll nudge easily towards its claimed efficiency figure in mixed, everyday use to help assuage any concerns about its tame DC charging speed.

Inside, its huge OLED circular display is deliciously rich, admirably resists sunlight and makes short work of turning off active safety tech. The black and red colour scheme is a tad overwrought, but it’s hard not to smile at a third steering wheel spoke being a dynamic strap of fabric. Mini remains tongue-in-cheek in the EV age – an enviable character trait to help it stand firm against an increasing bank of fresh, sometimes humourless Chinese rivals. Mini’s is a design team that continues to have fun, and you need a heart of stone to not indulge their more whimsical notions.

Outside, it appears more cohesive than its petrol equivalent – a benefit of its base car being a blank-sheet design on a newer platform. But bear in mind you can apply a JCW styling kit to cheaper, smoother electric Minis if it’s only the looks you crave.

Or you can pay £1640 less for a petrol JCW. Still a boisterous affair, it is noticeably fleeter of foot and has the lift-off hooliganism of older Works Minis more readily on tap. Aside from the venerable Volkswagen Polo GTI, it’s the only small petrol hot hatch still on sale, making it perhaps the shrewder John Cooper Works purchase for a little longer at least.

Nevertheless, this electric iteration carries plenty of intrigue, while its ragged dynamics and notable road roar ensure it vehemently avoids the path of swisher, more cocooning small EVs. There’s clear depth beneath its rougher edges and, keeping our glass half full, it joins a promising little sector. The Alpine A290 proves you can nip under 1.5 tonnes and offer decent ride quality with its hydraulic bump stops, while a brand-new Peugeot e-208 GTi will soon join the fray. It will be a while before we can gather them all together, but this punchy little Mini feels ready to scrap.

STEPHEN DOBIE

TECH SPEC

MINI JOHN COOPER WORKS ELECTRIC

Going electric hasn’t muted the JCW’s uncouth swagger. Should be lighter and defter but offers quick, ragged fun if you can bear the ride

★★★½☆

Price £34,905
Engine Permanent magnet synchronous motor
Power 255bhp
Torque 258lb ft
Gearbox 1-spd reduction gear, FWD
Kerb weight 1725kg
0-62mph 5.9sec
Top speed 124mph
Battery 54.2/49.2kWh (total/usable)
Range, economy 230 miles, 4.1mpkWh
CO_2, tax band 0g/km, 3%
Rivals Alpine A290, Cupra Born

TESTED 21.5.25, SURREY **DELIVERIES** NOW

GENESIS ELECTRIFIED GV70

Update for Audi Q6 rival as Hyundai's luxury brand goes electric-only

It has now been a decade since the genesis of, erm, Genesis. The Hyundai Motor Group's luxury brand has already made big inroads in its home market of South Korea and in the US, where it has become a genuine rival to established upper-crust players. Europe was always going to be a tougher nut to crack, but four years after it arrived over here, it's starting to gain a foothold and is now ready to refresh its line-up for the first time.

Now on a 'path to electrification' (although industry uncertainty over legislation has led bosses to recently reveal that hybrid powertrains are now in the pipeline), Genesis has pruned its range to just three models, all of them EVs, and it's the brand's flagship SUV, the Electrified GV70, that's the first to be given a dose of mid-life razzle-dazzle.

Largely confined to cosmetic updates, technology tweaks and a streamlined variant line-up, this refresh also includes the addition of a bigger battery for greater stamina.

Approach the GV70 from the front and it's not hard to miss the changes, with the vast diamond-patterned grille (as on most EVs, it's actually a flush panel), slimmer LED headlights and reprofiled bumpers giving it some imposing, knock-off-Bentley kerb appeal.

One neat new detail is a nose-mounted charging port hidden behind a powered door that features a heating element to prevent it from being frozen shut in icy conditions.

Climb aboard and the most obvious update has been to the infotainment system (of course), with the addition of an almost full-width digital dashboard. However, unlike rival set-ups that stitch together a number of screens to create a panoramic look, the GV70's 27-incher is a single OLED display. It looks good and works reasonably well, plus its inclusion doesn't come at the expense of actual physical controls: there are still some nicely knurled knobs for the audio volume and temperature settings.

The rest of the spacious cabin is

Ride is great at higher speeds and noise is well suppressed

> **"It now has virtual gears and a soundtrack that's the love child of a straight six and a spaceship"**

New interior deftly blends traditional luxury with modern technology

It prefers to waft rather than weave like a Macan can

as before, which means it retains its compellingly Korean take on luxury. Fit and finish is top-notch, while rich materials are used throughout, particularly in cars trimmed with the optional quilted nappa leather.

Genesis's product planners have rejigged the line-up so that there are now three distinct trim levels: Pure (as tested here), Dynamic and Luxury. All three come lavishly equipped and feature the same underpinnings, which means all get the same dual-motor powertrain, which packs 483bhp when Boost mode is engaged (the standard output is a still-handy 429bhp).

There is now a larger 84kWh battery (up from 77kWh), but it increases the range by just 15 miles to a hardly class-leading 298 miles (the claimed efficiency of 3.2mpkWh is sub-par too).

Still, thanks to an 800V electrical architecture, it's possible to charge the car at rates of up to 350kW, resulting in a theoretical 10-80% top-up time of just 19 minutes.

Given that the mechanicals have largely been carried over, it's no surprise that the GV70 drives much the same as before, which is to say it ultimately favours a relaxed rather than road-burning approach.

That said, the big Korean is no slouch. That enlarged battery means a kerb weight increase of 25kg, slowing the Boost-assisted 0-62mph time by a couple of tenths – although 4.4sec is plenty fast enough for a 2.3-tonne SUV.

A new 'AI' drive mode claims to tune the driving experience to suit the road and your mood, but you can also still select from the usual Eco, Comfort and Sport modes.

With the exception of Eco, all bring a nicely responsive throttle for effortless everyday acceleration.

If only the brakes were as smooth: the transition from regeneration to friction is still a little clumsy.

Genesis has clearly also raided Hyundai's digital parts bin, because the GV70 now has 'virtual gears', much like in the Ioniq 5 N. As with that car, the set-up is surprisingly effective and accompanied by a synthesised and subtle soundtrack that's the lovechild of a straight six and a spaceship.

Tackle some twisties and you will find the steering is lifeless but offers accuracy and consistent response, while overall grip levels and traction are high.

In everyday use, there's a nicely paced flow to the GV70, but hustle it harder and it struggles to maintain larger body movements, while the car feels like it's slumping onto its outside rear wheel as you aim for a slingshot corner exit.

Ultimately, the GV70 is at its best when simply wafting – which, let's face it, is what most owners will do. Rolling refinement is excellent, with driveline, road and wind noise virtually non-existent, and the GV70 rides with real composure once up to speed.

Less impressive is its low-speed gait, which can be jerkily stiff-legged over sharp imperfections and potholes, even on the smaller 19in rims of our entry-level car.

Still, while you feel these assaults on the suspension, the excellent acoustic isolation means you rarely hear them.

Overall, then, the GV70 remains a likeable left-field choice for buyers wanting an easy-going, upmarket electric SUV – especially those who are tired of Teslas, bored of BMWs and find Mercedes a bit 'meh'. However, if you do want something more dynamic and poised, it will be hard to look past the slower but sharper entry-level Porsche Macan Electric.

JAMES DISDALE

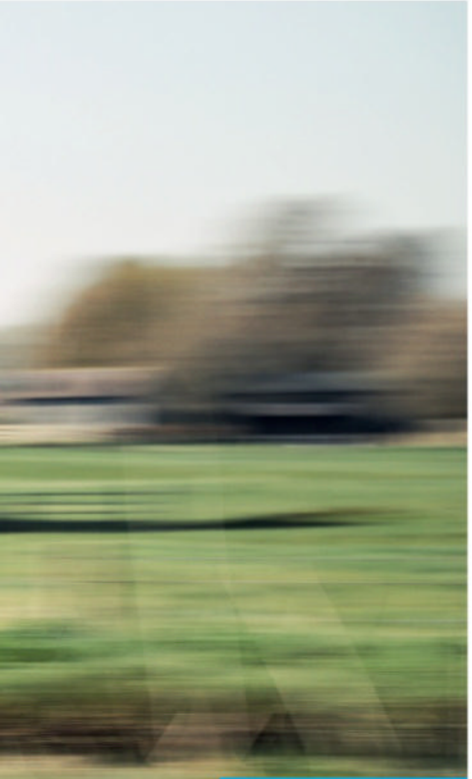
TECH SPEC

GENESIS ELECTRIFIED GV70 PURE

Thoughtful upgrades add to the appeal of this likeable premium SUV, but the range and efficiency are nothing to write home about

★★★½☆

Price £65,915
Engine Two permanent magnet synchronous motors
Power 429bhp (483bhp with Boost)
Torque 516lb ft
Gearbox 1-spd reduction gear, 4WD
Kerb weight 2335kg
0-62mph 4.4sec (with Boost)
Top speed 146mph
Battery 84.0kWh (total)
Range, economy 298 miles, 3.2mpkWh
CO_2, tax band 0g/km, 3%
Rivals Audi Q6 Sportback, Polestar 4, Porsche Macan Electric



TESTER'S NOTE

As before, Genesis is leaning heavily into the aftersales experience with its five-year care plan, which includes a 'personal assistant' and concierge servicing. **JD**

Absolute
Radio

WANT MORE REAL MUSIC
IN YOUR WORK DAY?

NO REPEAT
GUARANTEE

YOU WON'T HEAR THE SAME SONG TWICE.
9AM-5PM WEEKDAYS

Digital Radio
Rayo App
"Play Absolute Radio"

TESTER'S NOTE

As well as allowing low-speed electric-only driving, the latest A6's gearbox-mounted electric motor can usefully boost power and torque to aid overtaking. **SC**

TESTED 20.5.25, NORTH YORKSHIRE **DELIVERIES** NOVEMBER

AUDI A6 AVANT

How does this big all-new exec estate cope on tight, battered UK roads?

If ever there were a car for which our final verdict depends on the way it drives on UK roads, this new Audi A6 Avant is it. It starts with plenty of positives and one of the most important is that it's only the third model to use Audi's latest PPC platform, employed by the recently revised A5 and Q5. It has a svelte new look too.

It's also super-streamlined, with a 0.25 Cd, yet there's up to 1500 litres of load space. It weighs 'only' two tonnes, which means its kerb weight undercuts similar-sized EVs by 500kg. Its driving position also avoids the increasingly common compromise of requiring the driver to sit on top of a big EV battery, but it's still a hybrid and can do short, fuel-saving manoeuvres on electric power. Its combined fuel consumption is quoted as a creditable near-50mpg (though on our test drive, we didn't get within 15mpg of that).

So to the potential drawbacks. For now, it's diesel only, with the stigma and possible residual issues this brings. Before the end of the year, though, there will be TFSI petrol cars with similar power to this diesel's 201bhp. And it's a big car – 5.0m long and 2.1m wide – in a country where small size is often important. Audi makes smaller models: does this larger one make sense?

We've been quite impressed with this car in foreign parts, but driving the new right-handed version in difficult local conditions – on some narrow, swoopy and poorly surfaced roads around Swaledale in the Yorkshire Dales, where oncoming traffic tends to appear without warning – is a tougher test for any car, especially a big one. The A6 coped pretty well.

First things first. It's comfortable and roomy. The interior is familiar from the other models that use the PPC platform and very Audi, which means it's well made and pretty easy to understand, given the sheer number of functions on offer (including an optional front passenger info screen). You sit low, so you can achieve an ideal relationship to the steering wheel, and the standard seats (our Edition 1 Plus model's cabin was close to the mid-spec S Line) are supportive and comfortable. Diesels are Quattros as standard, but with a facility to declutch the rear wheels and save transmission drag when major traction isn't needed.

The car steers and grips as well as the best of the modern Audis, but there are two areas of very noticeable progress on the dynamic front. The first is the sweetly damped suppleness of the optional air suspension, even in the sportier modes, despite the fact that this model rides 20mm lower than the entry-level version.

The second is the enjoyable quietness. This car gets 30% more sound-deadening than previous versions, plus noise-killing improvements to its door sealing and its engine mounts. The latter change works very well: unless you really punt it hard, the 2.0-litre four-pot diesel is mostly unobtrusive, and vibration through the pedals and floor, often a diesel foible, is never noticed.

To us at Autocar, the case for big cars (make your own decision about the prestige thing) rests on ride comfort, load space and cabin room. If your big car can't make a good job of offering these things, buy a smaller one. Especially since it's likely to undercut this Edition 1 Plus by at least £15,000. But the new A6 does bring true advantages with its size and would especially make them tell on journeys, particularly family journeys. It's not a stretched or compromised version of another Audi. The A6 seems very happy in its own skin.

STEVE CROPLEY

Roomy cabin feels well constructed; driving position is excellent

Streamlined shape brings MPG benefits; it's a quiet cruiser too

TECH SPEC

AUDI A6 AVANT TDI QUATTRO EDITION 1 PLUS

Latest A6 Avant progresses a respected executive estate on most fronts, especially in the areas of refinement and ride comfort

★★★★☆

Price £79,255
Engine 4 cyls in line, 1968cc, turbocharged, diesel, plus electric motor and ISG
Power 201bhp at 3800-4200rpm
Torque 295lb ft at 1750-3250rpm
Gearbox 7-spd dual-clutch automatic, 4WD
Kerb weight 2000kg
0-62mph 7.0sec
Top speed 148mph
Economy 48.7mpg
CO_2, tax band 153g/km, 36%
Rivals BMW 5 Series Touring, Volvo V90 T6, Mercedes-Benz E220d Estate

ROAD TEST

AUTOCAR **ROAD TEST 5751**

LOTUS EMEYA

Is this electric super-saloon the second coming of the Lotus Carlton?

MODEL TESTED
LOTUS EMEYA 600 GT
Price £91,305
Power 604bhp at 17,000rpm
Torque 524lb ft
0-60mph 4.1sec
30-70mph 2.8sec
Top speed 155mph
70-0mph 43.3m (20deg C, dry)
Range 218/237/307 miles (average/touring/everyday)
Economy 2.2/2.4/3.1mpkWh (average/touring/everyday)
Weighted average charging rate 319kW

The Emeya is the fourth stage in the masterplan to transform the new, revitalised Lotus from beloved but niche sports car maker to global luxury car manufacturer.

The Emira sports car and Evija hypercar lend the brand credibility, reassuring everyone that the old Lotus hasn't left the building. The Eletre is to be the relative volume seller because, globally, big SUVs are what luxury car buyers want.

Exactly what the Emeya brings to the table is more of a head-scratcher. It appears that for all its bold reinvention plans, Lotus is still governed by a certain European car orthodoxy that dictates a sporting brand must have a super-saloon, even though that particular genre has become far less popular than it once was. For instance, Porsche sells only a fraction as many Panameras as it does Cayennes.

The Emeya, of course, is an EV, as most new Lotuses will be, which puts this saloon toe to toe with the Porsche Taycan. The Taycan itself is not quite flying out of showrooms the way Porsche might like it to and is already being markedly outsold by the Macan Electric.

It's unlikely, then, that the Emeya will pull in the big volumes. Instead, it needs to prove to the world – and buyers unconvinced by SUVs – that Lotus can still make a serious fast saloon, regardless of whether it's powered by petrol or electricity, or made in Hethel or Wuhan.

DESIGN & ENGINEERING

★★★★☆

PROS 800V architecture; usefully big battery; advanced chassis tech
CONS Big and heavy; ADAS protrusions

In very simple terms, the Emeya is the saloon version of the Eletre SUV that we have now known for a year or so. That means it uses the 800V architecture, takes a very large battery and is available with an armoury of dynamics-enhancing tech including air suspension and four-wheel steering.

The motors are the same as on the Eletre as well. The Emeya 600 has dual 302bhp permanent magnet synchronous motors, while the Emeya 900 replaces the rear motor with a 604bhp unit and a two-speed gearbox, for a total of 906bhp.

Dig into the details and you will unearth a few technical differences from the Eletre, particularly concerning the battery. To make it suitable for a saloon, here the cooling elements are housed in a channel through the middle of the pack, which makes it a useful 20mm lower but does reduce the capacity a bit. The cooling itself and the battery management are also a generation on from the Eletre, accelerating the charging rate to up to 420kW.

Emeya is twinned with the Eletre SUV

Design work took place in Coventry under Ben Payne. It's a different team from the one that styled the Emira and Evija, and you can tell. There is a clear family resemblance between the Eletre and the Emeya, but less so with the sports cars. Unlike the upcoming Jaguar EV, it fully embraces the EV aesthetic with a short bonnet and an ultra-long wheelbase, the Emeya adding 50mm to the Eletre's already over-three-metre-long wheelbase.

That makes the Emeya a very big car. At 5.1m, it's only slightly shorter than a Mercedes EQS and a fair bit longer than a Porsche Taycan. In Fireglow Orange, our test car certainly garnered plenty of looks.

Thanks to plenty of aluminium in the structure and the body panels, the Emeya is closer in weight to the Taycan than the EQS, but at 2478kg on Horiba MIRA's weighbridge, it's still heavier than three S1 Elises.

As on the Volvo EX90, the Geely influence makes itself evident in the multitude of flaps and protrusions for various cameras and sensors for the advanced driver assistance systems (ADAS). There are berths for lidars on the roof, in the rear hatch and on the front wings, and the prominent black patches on the doors are for rear-facing cameras. Most of this tech is optional, however, which meant that our test car had the motorised housing on the roof that would pop up when you unlocked the car, even though it didn't contain a functional sensor.

INTERIOR

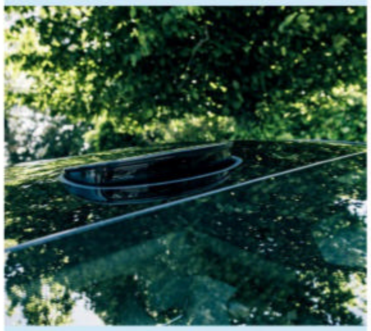
★★★★☆

PROS Material and build quality; driving position; infotainment, hi-fi
CONS Could do with more buttons; high floor in rear and boot

Unless you're already familiar with the Eletre, you are likely to be astounded at the quality of materials and build in the Emeya's interior. While Lotuses traditionally had an appealingly functional aesthetic, they weren't usually luxurious. The Emeya couldn't be more different: almost any surface that isn't covered in soft, smooth leather or Alcantara is made of real metal or carbonfibre. The intricate curves and shapes of the dash and door panels give it a recognisable look, despite the relative absence of physical controls.

Your main way of interacting with most of the systems is through the 15.1in central touchscreen, but thankfully there are some buttons and rocker switches for the climate control, the central locking and the glovebox, while paddles on the steering wheel let you quickly cycle through the settings for the drive mode and regenerative braking.

■ Most Emeyas get these 412mm, six-piston steel brakes, which proved very effective. Entry-level cars get four-piston items. On top-level 600 Sport SE and 900 Sport Carbon, a 10-piston carbon-ceramic set-up is available. Tyres are Lotus-specific Pirellis or Michelins.



■ Like the Volvo EX90 and other high-end Geely group cars, the Emeya is available with lidar sensors for semi-autonomous driving functions. Our test car didn't have the £4250 option but did have the pop-out pod for it on the roof. The front wings also have spaces for lidars.

The screen is big, clear and very responsive, and the menu layout is logical and has relatively few sub-menus. As a result, you can find what you're after quickly enough, but some controls still feel strange and inaccessible: the adjustment of the heated and ventilated seats, and the fan speed, are in a sub-menu, for example.

Generally, the infotainment is well thought out, with sensible smartphone integration, a clear navigation system with up-to-date traffic information and enough shortcut buttons. This feels like progress after our experience of the Eletre's equivalent infotainment tech a year or so ago, which was at the time notably less usable.

Every version features an excellent 1380W 15-speaker KEF hi-fi system, which you can enjoy to the fullest since the Emeya is relatively quiet at a motorway cruise.

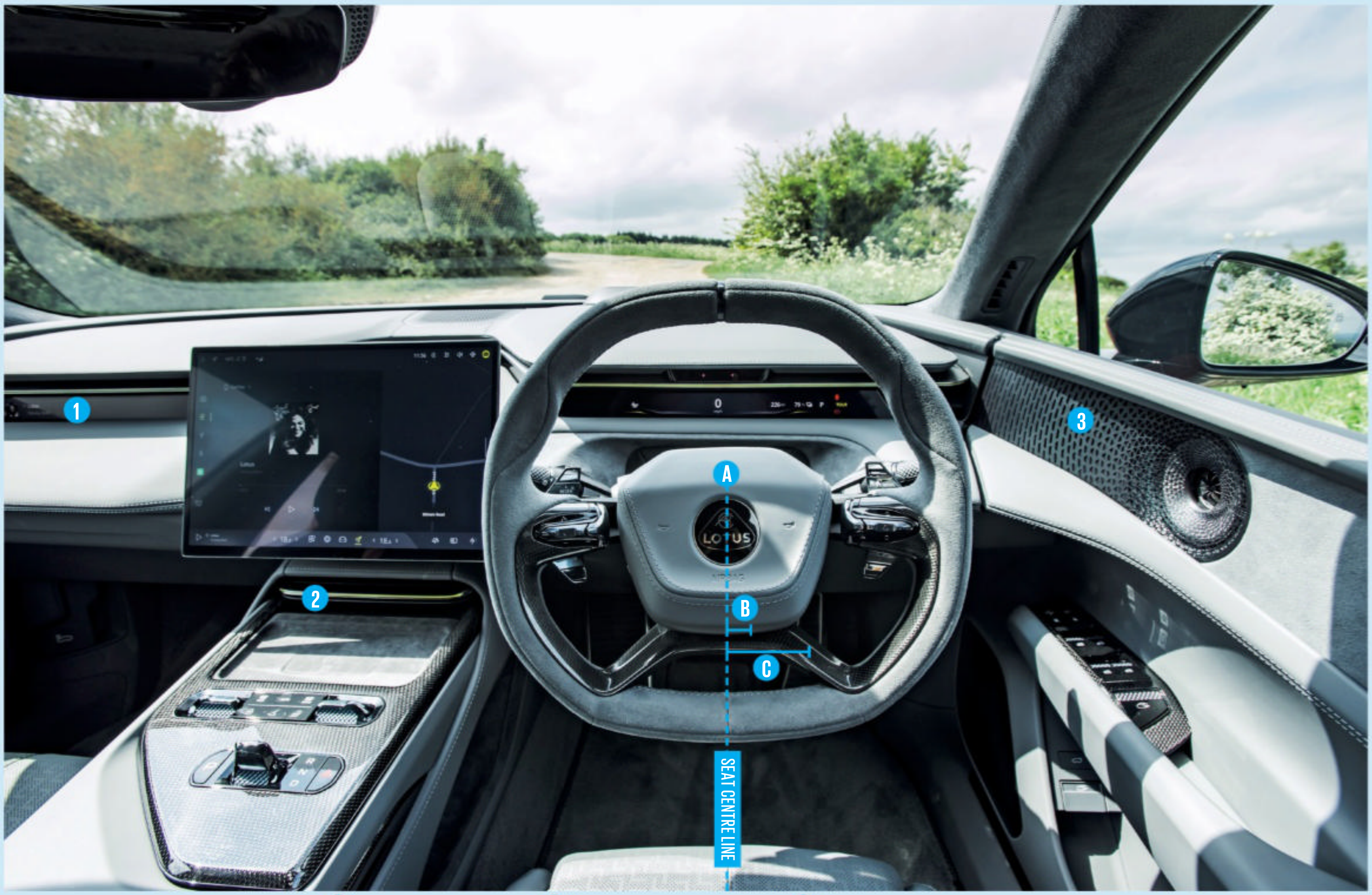
In the front, at least, making the Emeya's battery lower than the Eletre's seems to have worked, because the straight-legged driving position is comparable to a Porsche Taycan's and doesn't feel notably perched. The difference is that the Lotus's scuttle is lower, which makes it feel less cocooned ▶

PHOTOGRAPHY JACK HARRISON

① Passenger screen is standard, but doesn't do very much. It displays media information and the time, and can be swiped to change the song. It doesn't show navigation or speed.

② Air vents look sleek, with their strip of ambient lighting, but you need to use the touchscreen to adjust the direction of the air. Rocker switches control the temperature and feel weighty.

③ A 1380W, 15-speaker audio system from KEF is standard. It can be upgraded to a 23-speaker set-up, but there's no need: it already sounds outstanding. Metal grilles are a nice detail.



WHEEL AND PEDAL ALIGNMENT Ⓐ Steering offset 0mm Ⓑ Brake offset 20mm right Ⓒ Accelerator offset 160mm right. Wide range of steering column adjustment gives a classic GT driving position. Compact driver display is never blocked by the steering wheel.

◂ but airier – a matter of preference.

Although the optional 18-way adjustable seats in our test car weren't short of configurability on paper, they did lack a little under-thigh support and were somewhat meanly padded. The Porsche's softer chairs would be more comfortable over long distances.

Thanks to the Emeya's lengthy wheelbase, rear passengers are well catered for knee room, but the floor in the back feels high and there's not much room under the front seats for your feet, so it's not the most comfortable position. Head room is limited too, even with the backrest in its most reclined position. The boot similarly suffers: there's plenty of flat surface area but not much height. At least the big hatchback makes the area easy to access.

PERFORMANCE

★★★★☆

PROS Real-world performance; accelerator progression; regen paddles; dry and wet braking
CONS Over-sensitive brake pedal at low speeds

Until not too long ago, an EV's performance tended to significantly tail off at motorway speeds. The latest fast EVs have made it a lot less noticeable, but the Emeya tries to turn that on its head.

For a car with 604bhp – even one that weighs 2.5 tonnes – a 4.1sec 0-60mph time is a little underwhelming, and only slightly quicker than the entry-level single-motor Porsche Taycan (4.3sec). The Mercedes-AMG EQS 53 we tested in 2022 is half a second quicker. From 80mph, however, the Emeya starts to decisively pull away from the EQS. It needs almost six seconds less to reach 150mph and half a second less for the 50-80mph overtake.

Lotus has chosen electric motors of a fast-revving design to develop power and torque for longer, rather than torquier ones that run out of puff sooner (the max motor rpm is in excess of 17,000rpm; on an equivalent EQS or BMW i7, it's less than 14,000rpm). The effect is twofold. It makes the Emeya among the more autobahn-capable EVs, but also slightly less nausea-inducing at full power from low speeds, and then all the fiercer when powering out of corners on a B-road.

EVs this powerful can sometimes feel a little nervous on the road, but this is not the case with the Emeya. Even in Sport mode, it's easy to mete out as much or as little power as you wish with your right foot. Equally, Range mode is well judged too, making the car a bit more docile without artificially choking it.

Lotus gives the driver fairly granular control over the regenerative braking with the left-hand steering wheel paddles. The 'off' mode lets the car roll with seemingly no friction whatsoever, but while the strongest mode gives strong retardation, it never comes to a complete stop. The brake pedal is much firmer than the mushy pedals in the Taycan and EQS but is too sensitive at parking speeds.

We were very impressed with the Emeya's actual braking performance, however. It outbraked all the EV rivals we have tested by some margin on both dry and wet surfaces, and exhibited no fade.

RIDE & HANDLING

★★★★☆

PROS Outstanding steering feel; feels lighter and smaller than it is; noise isolation
CONS Lacks some handling adjustability

Even though our test car was in the most 'purist' spec available (standard motors, no four-wheel steering or active aerodynamics), any Emeya is a radically different car from the Lotuses of old. When you then also consider that Hethel had minimal input into this car, it would seem like a futile quest to look for Lotus DNA in this 2.5-tonne electric saloon.

And yet this is clearly no ordinary electric saloon. The steering is a particular highlight, and at least on a par with that of a mid-range Porsche Taycan. In fact, it's not dissimilar in feel. The engineers have resisted the temptation to make it excessively quick or darty. Instead, it seems intuitively linear, with medium-heavy weighting and a dry, connected feel to it. It self-centres well when pulling out of junctions, and the subtle ebb and flow of weight accurately tells you how much you're loading up the chassis in corners. It really is expertly judged.

It doesn't stop there, because the way the Emeya dives into corners belies its weight. The air suspension tightly controls the body but doesn't suppress roll and weight transfer completely. The balance is such that if you float the car into a turn off the power, it will gently rotate into it, like the best hot hatches. Power out, and the electronics can direct just enough torque rearwards to create a tiny bit of slip of the back wheels to keep the positive rotation going.

If there is a disappointment, it's that mild rotation is as exuberant as the Emeya gets. It never feels anything other than securely four-wheel drive, even with the (overly cautious) ESC switched off.

The differences between the Tour and Sport modes aren't enormous. The sense of mild rear bias to the torque split is slightly more pronounced in Sport than in Tour, and the air suspension firms up a little. Some might wish for more differentiation, but unlike in many cars with different suspension settings, Sport mode remains usable on UK roads.

You get the sense the suspension is fighting a little to keep the body in check over very bumpy roads. That is perhaps inevitable given how much weight it has to control, and you can't expect it to 'breathe with the road' in classic Lotus fashion. Ultimately, the Emeya rides well enough. It can't escape some head toss over uneven roads and some clunking over corrugations, but none of it is egregious for a sports saloon. Ultimately it can't compete for ride comfort with a Taycan on Porsche's extraordinary Active Ride system, but then nothing really can.

TRACK NOTES

★★★★☆

PROS Strong grip and traction; steering; brakes

CONS Prescriptive handling balance

Anyone dreaming of an electric Lotus Carlton will be disappointed by the Emeya. While it is very competent, it doesn't tolerate any ham-fisted hooliganism. Drive it neatly, and it will behave in much the same way as it does on the road. You're unlikely to run out of grip or traction, and the accurate and communicative steering lets you drive right up to the limit. Adding power or lifting off will tighten the line, but only up to a point. All of our attempts to get it sideways on the dry handling track proved futile.

On MIRA's wet handling circuit, the Emeya still preferred grip over slip. It is possible to overwhelm the rear axle with power, but holding a drift is very difficult, since the car seems to want to either pull itself out with front drive or spin. Instead, the most satisfying way around a wet circuit is to set the car up for a corner with some weight transfer, and then try to maintain neutral steer on the way out.

ASSISTED DRIVING

★★⯪☆☆

PROS Systems are easy to disable

CONS They're not very good

Our test subject was an early Emeya in a specification that is no longer available to order. Even though it was quite well equipped, it lacked both the Highway Assist Pack (£1900 on the base Emeya, standard on every other trim) and the £4250 Lidar Pack. Even so, you would expect a company that clearly takes assisted driving seriously to give a good showing even in standard spec.

Unfortunately, none of the ADAS worked all that well. The adaptive cruise control, while tolerable, was prone to braking if you engaged it while still a little too close to the car in front. On single carriageways it would often brake for oncoming traffic. The lane keep assist would bong and interfere with the steering too early, and the overspeed and driver fatigue warnings were especially keen to pipe up.

Thankfully, at the top of the screen there is a shortcut that takes you to an ADAS menu where you can disable all of them fairly easily. Even though the car turns on and off based on a person's weight being in the driver's seat, the ADAS don't immediately reactivate when you stop and get out of the car.

BUYING & OWNING

★★★★☆

PROS Industry-leading charging speed; well priced

CONS Poor efficiency; performance on 400V chargers

Earlier this year, Lotus reshuffled the Emeya and Eletre line-ups. What were formerly the S and the R are now the 600 and the 900, each with a handful of trim levels. Our test car was actually an S with some options, but it is broadly equivalent to a 600 GT.

A plain 600 is priced from £86,305. That's about £10,000 less than a Porsche Taycan 4S, and options are similarly priced for both. That said, cheaper Taycans are available if you're willing to settle for less power or fewer motors.

Arguably the Emeya's biggest shortcoming is its energy efficiency. The 2.4mpkWh touring figure is significantly worse than what we got from the more powerful Taycan Turbo S and gives the Emeya 600 a disappointing 237-mile cruising range. Conditions during our test were pretty much ideal too. Lotus quotes maximum regen up to 80kW, which pales in comparison to a Taycan's 400kW. It appears there are some gains to be made there.

It's a good thing, then, that the Emeya can charge very quickly indeed. No public charger in the UK can deliver the 420kW that Lotus claims the car can take, but we found a rare 400kW charger, and the Emeya maintained very high speeds throughout. There is one caveat to its performance, however. It has an 800V architecture, and while it can use 400V chargers, its speed is capped at a measly 80kW on those. ▸

FRONT Leg room 1120mm, head room 1020mm. Low scuttle makes the driving position seem less hunkered down than it really is.

REAR Leg room 850mm, head room 900mm. There's no shortage of leg room, but the high floor compromises the seating position.

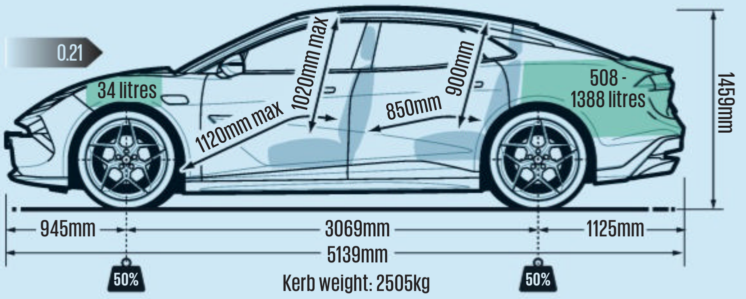
BOOT Length 1120-2090mm, width 1050-1230mm, height 350-560mm. Boot is big but not tall. Seats don't fold completely flat and leave a step down.

"The steering is a highlight. It really is expertly judged"

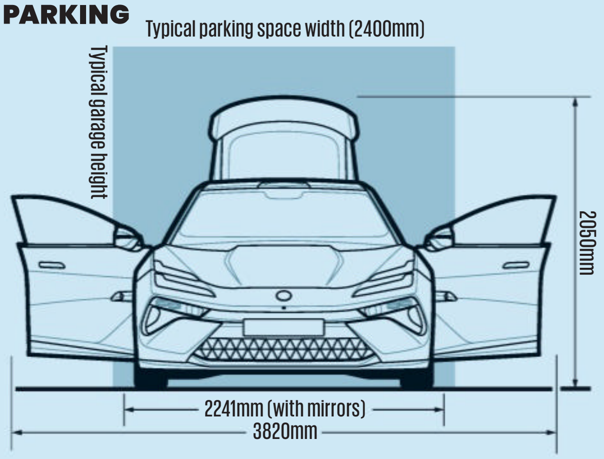
TEST RESULTS

DIMENSIONS

Length 5139mm **Width** 2241mm/2005mm (with/without mirrors) **Height** 1459mm **Door span** 3820mm **Max height to open bootlid** 2050mm


0.21
34 litres
1120mm max
1020mm max
850mm
900mm
508 - 1388 litres
1459mm
945mm
3069mm
1125mm
5139mm
50%
50%
Kerb weight: 2505kg

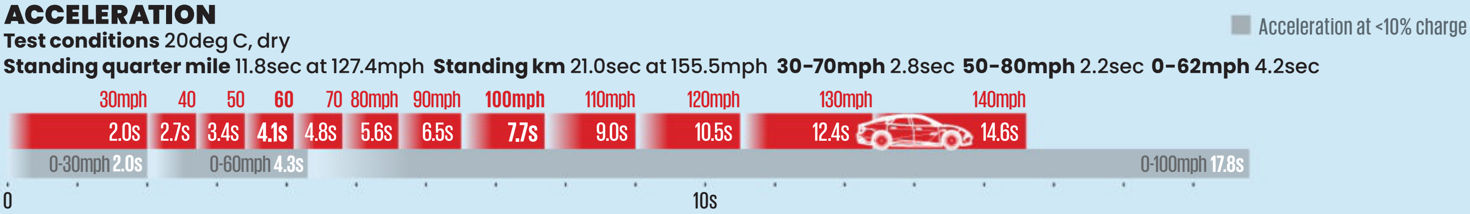
PARKING


Typical parking space width (2400mm)
Typical garage height
2050mm
2241mm (with mirrors)
3820mm

ACCELERATION

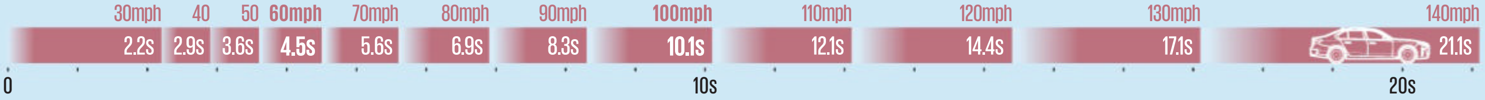
Test conditions 20deg C, dry

Standing quarter mile 11.8sec at 127.4mph **Standing km** 21.0sec at 155.5mph **30-70mph** 2.8sec **50-80mph** 2.2sec **0-62mph** 4.2sec



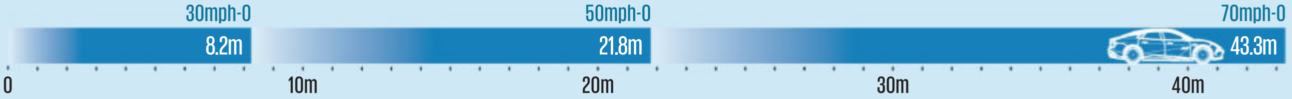
BMW i7 xDrive60 M Sport (2023, 8deg C, dry)

Standing quarter mile 12.9sec at 114.1mph **Standing km** 23.1sec at 143.6mph **30-70mph** 3.4sec **50-80mph** 3.3sec

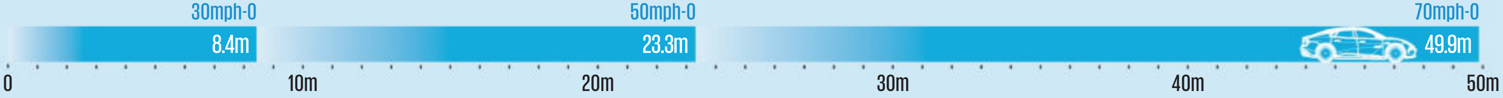


BRAKING

Dry 60-0mph 2.51sec

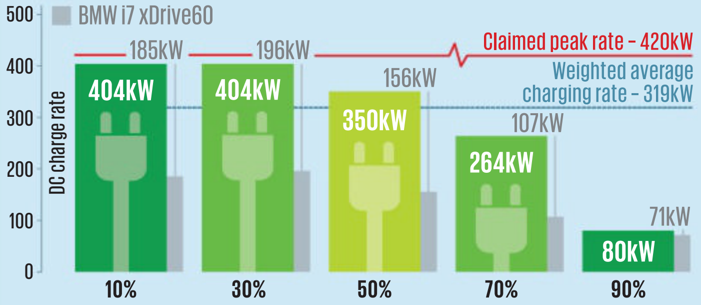


Wet 60-0mph 2.65sec



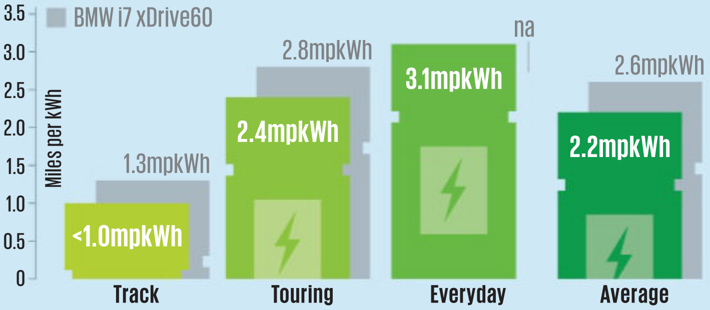
RAPID-CHARGING PERFORMANCE

Charging port location Offside rear wing **Charger used** Hypercharger HYC400, 400kW, Fastned **AC charging** 22kW, three-phase

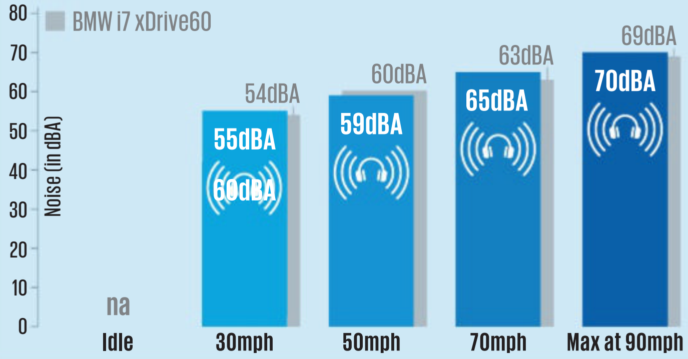


RUNNING EFFICIENCY

WLTP 335 miles, 2.9-3.3mpkWh (combined) **Test range** 218/237/307 miles (average/touring/everyday)

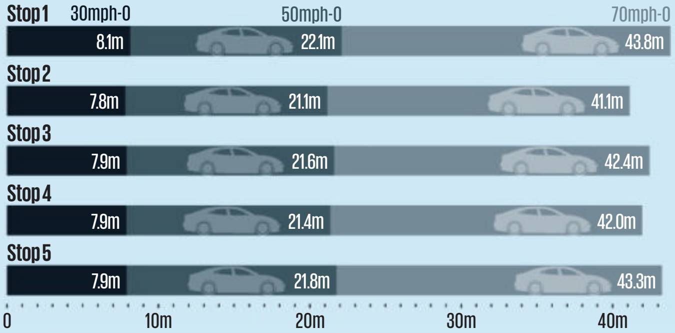


CABIN NOISE



BRAKING ENDURANCE

Fade variance 70-0m – stop 1 vs stop 5: -0.5m



PETER LIDDIARD

THE SMALL PRINT Power-to-weight and torque-to-weight figures are calculated using manufacturer's claimed kerb weight. Running efficiency is tested on a closed test track; 'touring' is representative of UK motorway driving, 'everyday' of intra-urban driving. Acceleration, braking and cabin noise are measured on reference surfaces, for cabin noise using a handheld decibel meter. Charging equipment may vary, but charger power always exceeds the advertised peak draw of the test car, unless stated. Second-row leg room is typical, measured behind a driver's seat set for 1000mm of leg room. © 2025, Haymarket Media Group Ltd. Test results may not be reproduced without editor's written permission.

MANUFACTURER'S SPECIFICATION

LOTUS EMEYA 600 GT

On-the-road price £91,305
Price as tested £102,555
Value after 3yrs/36k miles £38,800
Contract hire £1812 pcm (£10,872 deposit + 36 months/30,000 miles)
Typical PCP £1699 pcm (£15,000 deposit + 35 months/30,000 miles, £38,101 final payment)

FITTED EQUIPMENT

Standard Keyless entry, matrix LED headlights, adaptive cruise control, Highway Assist Pack (not fitted to test car), heated seats, 15.1in touchscreen and passenger touchscreen, six months of Lotus Connect Prestige, KEF audio
Optional Fireglow Orange paint (not available on 600 GT), 21in 10-spoke wheels £1000, Magnetite interior £2000, Comfort Seat Pack £3900, active rear spoiler £2000
Also available Side cameras £2000, Active Aero Pack £3500

MOTOR & BATTERY

Installation Front and rear, transverse, 4WD
Type Two permanent magnet synchronous motors
Power 604bhp at 17,000rpm
Torque 524lb ft
Maximum regen capacity 80kW
Battery type NMC
Capacity 102.0/98.9kWh (total/usable)
Voltage 705V
Power to weight 241bhp per tonne
Torque to weight 209lb ft per tonne

GEARBOX

Type 1-spd reduction gear (front and rear)
Reduction ratio 9.19:1 (front and rear)
mph per 1000rpm 9.5
rpm at 70/80mph 7354/8404

CHASSIS & BODY

Construction Steel and aluminium monocoque
Weight/as tested 2505kg/2478kg
Weight distribution (f/r) 50%/50%
Drag coefficient 0.21
Wheels 9.5Jx21in (f), 11.5Jx21in (r)
Tyres 265/40 R21 105Y (f), 305/35 R21 109Y (r), Pirelli P Zero Elect LTS
Spare None

SUSPENSION & STEERING

Front and rear Multi-link, two-chamber air springs, adaptive dampers, anti-roll bar **Steering** EPAS, rack and pinion; 2.5 turns lock to lock; 11.9m turning circle

BRAKES

Front 412mm ventilated discs, six-piston calipers **Rear** 397mm ventilated discs, two-piston calipers **Handbrake type** Electronic, automatic

EMISSIONS & TAX

CO₂ 0g/km
BIK at 20/40% pcm £51/£101

VERDICT

A good electric saloon and a good Lotus

★★★★☆

To justify its existence, the Emeya needs to prove Lotus can not only build a competitive EV sports saloon but also instil classic Lotus values into it.

It does so with a chassis that shows unusual poise and suitability for UK roads. Although its real-world charging speed will be limited by the charger used, its industry-leading speed is quite the feat.

The Emeya also has an interior whose materials and quality wouldn't look out of place in an even more expensive car. Its copious performance is both usable and exciting on the road too.

Overall, the Porsche Taycan is a more rounded and technically impressive proposition, and Lotus will need to work hard on its cars' efficiency and packaging to remain relevant, but the Emeya has enough going for it as an appealing alternative, and to carry its historical baggage with dignity.

TESTERS' NOTES

ILLYA VERPRAET
I wasn't sure about the four-spoke steering wheel at first, but it's perfectly positioned, the thin, firm rim is nice to hold, and the spokes are well positioned to change your grip at a motorway cruise. The buttons and switches on it are a little unusual but work well.

MATT SAUNDERS
Lotus gets so close to the ideal regen set-up: steering wheel paddles (up for more regen, down for less) with a few strengths and a freewheeling mode. Unfortunately, there's no one-pedal mode and it forgets your last setting on start-up.

FACELIFT FIXES

- Dramatically improve the energy efficiency.
- Introduce a few more buttons to the interior.
- Improve the ADAS.

RANKING RIVALS

	1	2	3	4	5	
	PORSCHE TAYCAN 4S	**BMW i7 eDRIVE50 M SPORT**	**LOTUS EMEYA 600 GT**	**MERCEDES-AMG EQE 53 NIGHT EDITION**	**TESLA MODEL S PLAID**	**POLESTAR 5**
	The benchmark for the electric sports saloon. Combines speed, ride, handling and efficiency.	More limo than sports saloon, but retains enough dynamism. A little chintzy inside.		Bigger EQS 53 is no more. EQE is quick and handles well but feels a little robotic.	LHD-only Tesla is an electric muscle car: absurdly quick, with no dynamism. Good real-world efficiency.	This super-saloon may just out-Lotus Lotus. Developed in the UK and with an aluminium chassis. Could be brilliant.
	★★★★⯪	★★★★⯪		★★★⯪☆	★★★⯪☆	
Price	£96,200	£120,245		£105,995	£96,840 (from stock)	£95,000*
Power, torque	590bhp, 524lb ft	536bhp, 549lb ft		617bhp, 701lb ft	1020bhp, na	874bhp*, 664lb ft*
0-62mph, top speed	3.7sec, 155mph	4.7sec, 149mph		3.5sec, 137mph	2.1sec, 160mph	3.1sec*, 112mph*
Range, economy	400 miles, 3.5mpkWh	385 miles, 3.3mpkWh		306 miles, 2.9mpkWh	373 miles, 3.3mpkWh	380 miles*, 3.0mpkWh*

* ESTIMATED

AUTOCAR PODCAST

MY WEEK IN CARS

Steve Cropley

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MATT SAUNDERS

Testing, testing

Is being an emergency back-up more stressful than being in control?

The driverless car now seems to have become a risky, possibly even toxic prospect for a great many industry powers. Having invested keenly, the big traditional players – Ford, Volkswagen, General Motors – have pulled back.

It was a bit of holiday reading that made me realise how starkly attitudes have changed on the subject. In 21 Lessons for the 21st Century, historian Yuval Noah Harari writes with startling certainty about "AI's potential to reduce the world's million annual driving-related deaths to practically zero".

So I checked when this book was published: 2018. Bang on the pace, as ever, Saunders. Since then, the world has had its first recorded case of a pedestrian being killed by an autonomous vehicle: Elaine Herzberg, 49, in March 2019 in Tempe, Arizona, as she pushed her bicycle across a highway in front of one of Uber's experimental self-driving Volvo XC90s.

And Herzberg's death isn't the half of it. According to data from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration analysed by Texas-based Craft Law last year, 83 fatalities resulting from accidents that involved self-driving cars were recorded in the US between 2019 and June 2024. The firm's report didn't make it clear how many of those fatalities were directly caused by a driverless car, I should add, but even assuming the number is as low as half of that, or a quarter, it's probably still a great many more than you might have imagined regulators would allow.

"The most vital connection is to the nut behind the wheel"

As other formerly enthusiastic voices have fallen quiet on the tech, Elon Musk's remains forthright. The other day, an email landed from Tesla linking to videos showing a Model 3 that – using what it rather carefully describes as new "Full Self-Driving (supervised) software" but only what sensory and computing hardware already exists on the car – is driving around busy, crowded, cobbled and higgledy-piggledy central Paris entirely on its own. The video particular to the Place de l'Étoile – that monstrous roundabout around the Arc de Triomphe, after most circuits of which you feel quite lucky to be alive, even when there's a safe pair of human hands at the wheel – is scarcely believable.

But it was the hands at the wheel – or, rather, permanently half-clasped just underneath it, ready to grab the rim at a moment's notice – that struck me about those videos. They look nervous. Sweaty, even.

What on earth, for the sake of argument, would be the point of an autonomous car that you couldn't trust? That couldn't give you enough notice to take control when something might be going wrong in front of it? If you think the quantity of beeps and bongs that new cars already make is annoying when they're only trying to assist you, how bad are they likely to become when the software's trying to do so much more?

'Handover' is a big question. In the case of Elaine Herzberg, investigators discovered, the car's supervising driver tried to steer around the unfortunate pedestrian only two seconds before impact. Apparently, she died not only because the car couldn't identify her as a hazard, or even at all, but because it failed to communicate quickly enough with its 'responsible adult' to flag up a potential mishap, or just to say: 'Hey, what's that?'

Which brings me back to Harari. The connectedness of artificial intelligence, he insists, will be what makes it succeed in replacing human drivers. Don't think of one computer driving your car – imagine data from a thousand driverless cars nearby, all feeding into its cloud-based decision-making.

I can do that. But what Harari is missing is that the most vital, always-on, gigabit network connection that it will definitely need, for the foreseeable future, will still be to the nut behind the wheel – the human driver, or whatever he or she ends up being called (shudder).

And if that 'driver' suffers with sweaty palms? Well, how many of us already prefer driving to being driven anyway?

Call me a Luddite if you like, but I'm willing to bet that, for a while at least, actually driving a driverless car might well be considerably the more relaxing experience.

Vive la Renaulution

Fabrice Cambolive, a Renault veteran and now its CEO, has been pivotal in the brand's bold transformation plan. **JAMES ATTWOOD** catches up with him

PHOTOGRAPHY JOHN BRADSHAW

Fabrice Cambolive is a proud Frenchman and he has worked for the country's largest car manufacturer for more than three decades. So it seems odd that one of the main strengths he says he brings to his role as CEO of the Renault brand is an outside perspective.

But it makes more sense when you see his career trajectory: the 55-year-old has worked in Brazil, Spain, Switzerland, Germany, Romania and Russia and also served as the boss of Renault's operations in Africa, the Middle East, India and the Pacific. Bringing that experience to the CEO role, he says, means that he can "look at the brand from an uber angle".

He adds: "I spent 30 years abroad in many, many countries. I was half part of Renault, because on the one hand I was a full Renault product, but on the other hand I could see Renault from a different, international perspective."

Cambolive returned 'home' three years ago, shortly after Luca de Meo – whom he worked with early in his career – was named head of the overall Renault Group. Cambolive initially led Renault's sales and operations division as de Meo's transformative 'Renaulution' initiative was rolled out, before being promoted to chief operating officer in 2022, and CEO a year later.

He says the goal now is to "build the brand for the future" and he talks of leading Renault as "a unique chance to participate in a global project in terms of environment, mobility, technology, sociology – this is what Renault means for me, with a focus on the product.

"When you look at what we did in the last four years with Luca, four years ago Renault was in a complicated situation, and within a short amount of time we had to make some tough and bold choices in an environment that was really uncertain. Who could have bet on how quick the electrification in Europe would go, and with which kind of solution?

"What we decided was to build a very balanced brand, but in this global balance to make tough and bold choices."

As an example, Cambolive cites the decision to put hybrid powertrains in all its combustion-engined cars. "It was not obvious four years ago to say that the Clio hybrid would represent more than 40% of the mix in Europe," he says. That led to structural decisions, such as launching the Symbioz purely as a hybrid – "it was quite tough at the time because new technology is more expensive" – and to maintain bespoke EV and ICE platforms. "When you build an EV on a dedicated platform, you have a lot of benefits for the customer in terms of weight, roominess, design, connectivity and so on," he says.

Renault's push for balance doesn't just extend to separate EV and ICE platforms, though. The firm is also aiming for a more balanced split between fleet and retail sales, and to become even more balanced between its European operations and those elsewhere in the world.

That's where Cambolive's vast international experience and perspective should help. "Look at what's happening now, when everyone is talking about tariffs," he says. "But if you want sustainable development out of Europe, tariffs are only part of the equation."

Fabrice Cambolive has confirmed the new Twingo will be offered in the UK and indicated strong early sales of the 5 had helped convince the firm to invest in a right-hand-drive version.

That's why Renault is streamlining the number of platforms it offers but also localising production in key global markets and developing models specifically tailored to each region.

Asked what's currently occupying the bulk of his time, Cambolive cites three areas: "The first is we have to benefit from our very good product line-up in Europe in terms of volumes and profitability. The second part is to build the next product cycle, which is very important. And the third is to manage the growth of Renault in international markets."

Renault's European line-up has been dramatically reshaped in the past three years, with a flurry of new electric and hybrid vehicles in key SUV segments – and there is also the reimagined Renault 5. The concept version of that vehicle was the cornerstone of the Renaulution unveiling in 2021 – and the production version has fully delivered on the promise of an affordable, dynamic compact electric hatchback.

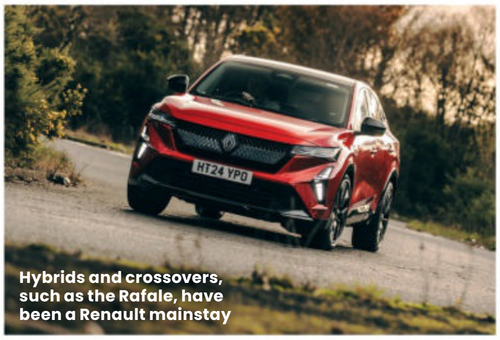
"Frankly, we could have taken one of our existing combustion cars and produced an electric version, but that would have been boring for everyone," says Cambolive. "Not only boring, but it would have been a pity for the customers when you see the potential of a dedicated EV platform to transform or to change the codes of a product."

He says the warm reception to the 5 is not just because of its retro design but also because "it brings emotion". He adds: "When you do this kind of product, you have to be serious. The fact to benefit from a dedicated platform made by Ampere [Renault's EV and software development arm], the fact to put the wheels of the car [at the corners], the fact to change the design code, the fact we invest a lot of money in agility, sportivity and body control – that, for me, meant we found the best balance between our history, our legacy, and a step towards modernity."

The retro nod of the 5, its 4 sibling and the smaller Twingo that will arrive next year isn't just in their styling, but also in the city car and hatchback market they sit in. "Over the last 30 or 40 years, Renault has been one of the leaders in the European B-segment. It's very important to have this base of loyalty, and to use this heritage to shift the B-segments and to break the glass ceiling of the electric transition," says Cambolive.

That's also indicative of Renault's push towards retail buyers. While the larger ▸

"What we decided was to build a very balanced brand"



Hybrids and crossovers, such as the Rafale, have been a Renault mainstay

Renault 4 continues the move to retro small EVs started by the 5 (right)

Renault 5 E-Tech electric world premiere

Cambolive and group CEO de Meo (right) have turned Renault's fortunes around

GETTY IMAGES

◂ Scenic sits in the fleet-happy C-segment, the 5, 4 and Twingo are all aimed at private buyers, who so far have been the most reluctant to embrace EVs. Renault's EV sales share in the UK is already pushing towards 30%.

But there's a reason there aren't many city cars on the market today, electric or otherwise: the cost to develop them remains high and the margins are small. Despite that, Cambolive insists Renault is committed to the segment, and the decision to invest in the Ampr Small platform – used by those three models and forthcoming Nissan twins, including the new Micra – is paying off.

He says: "Having a very modular platform enables us to fulfil all the customer needs in this segment, from hatch to SUV, from 3.8 to 4.2 metres. Now we can really target the sub-segments, which is very important, and to produce cars that are less expensive.

"The Renault 5 arrived at around €25,000, in part because we developed the car in record time. We announced Renault 5 three and a half years ago, and now it's on the road. Renault 4 we did in three years, and we'll do Twingo in less than two. If you can reduce development time, you can proportionally reduce the entry ticket investment – and, in turn, the price of our cars. And this is our bet in Europe: to be able to conceive and produce cars in a record time at a level of competitiveness that are better than our competitors, wherever they are coming from."

Filante concept explores ultimate EV efficiency but hydrogen is in the mix too

And while the 5 and 4 are European-led models, with his global viewpoint Cambolive believes they can work elsewhere: "More and more in Europe, we are developing global products. The 4 was a global product in the past. Why not to have it in the future also worldwide?"

While EVs seem the way forward in Europe, there is still major uncertainty about the pace of electrification, and whether other technologies might be relevant in the future. Renault appears to be keeping its options open, with concepts such as the land speed record-inspired Filante, which aims to push the boundaries of EV efficiency, and the hydrogen-powered Emblème.

"Alternative solutions like hydrogen remain very good solutions for the future, as long as we are able to launch them when the ecosystem to support them will be at the right level," says Cambolive. "For now, our focus is more to prioritise the shift to EV not only for passenger cars but also with our vans."

Cambolive's enthusiasm for Renault is clear when he talks, and it isn't for show: his current company car is a Renault 5 and he recounts with glee how much time he's shaved off his Paris commute compared with when he was running a larger SUV, even if he confesses that this has come at the expense of his eco driving score on the car's infotainment.

While the bosses of some legacy car brands are dealing with major dramas, things genuinely seem positive for Renault right now. Looking back on the transformation that the Renault Group underwent three years ago, Cambolive says he realised he could use his "international vision" of being a proud French person with global experience to help implement that bold initiative. Somehow, the Renault brand increasingly feels much like the man tasked with running it: more proudly French than ever, but with a vital global perspective. 🅰

"Renault's EV sales share in the UK is already pushing towards 30%"

GZ-913-EY
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Firm's early shift to hybrid models, such as Arkana, was a gamble but paid off

Cambolive has worked at Renault for three decades in "many, many countries"

New Twingo EV will go on sale next year; a starting price of £17,000 is tipped

Limited-run 5 Turbo 3E uses advanced EV tech and is priced at £135,000

IS THIS THE SHAPE OF THINGS TO COME FROM RENAULT?

The wildest statement of intent in Renault's revamped line-up is the 5 Turbo 3E, a limited-run electric reinvention of the 1980s Turbo 5 with an eye-watering £135,000 price.

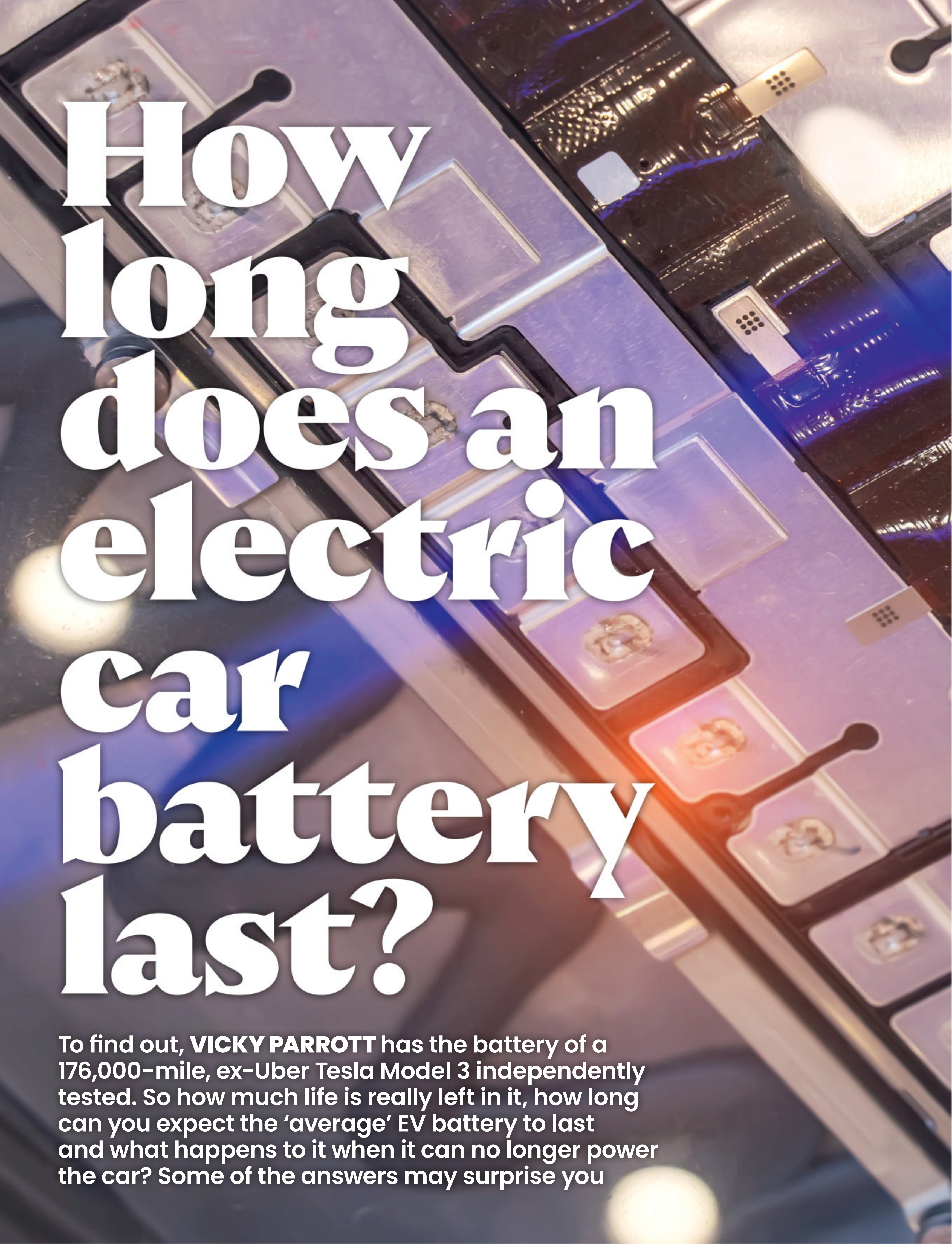
It's a hugely ambitious product for Renault, both in its technology – it might look like a souped-up 5 but it sits on a bespoke platform and features in-wheel motors that produce 3540lb ft of torque – and the firm's ability to command premium prices.

So far, it's worked, with Renault CEO Fabrice Cambolive noting that around 1000 orders were received in three days. He adds: "For me, it's proof that the car will definitely never be a commodity.

"It shows Renault is capable to play with a range that is very large, as long as you put value in the product. We put a lot of value in terms of innovation, with in-wheel motors, in terms of design, platform and raw material, and the passion we are putting in the car is reflected in interest."

That said, Cambolive says the Turbo 3E's success doesn't necessarily mean more high-end specials will follow. "We have to remain with a foot on earth," he adds. "It's proof we have to be capable to develop internally our own innovations, and to be very practical in the way we are conceiving our product. That's very important.

"Of course, it gives us ideas to develop a lot of cars in the sport series. It's too soon now to have a definitive answer on that, but it's a good example. We are now concentrating on the production of the car. Let's see after – but it opens opportunities."



How long does an electric car battery last?

To find out, **VICKY PARROTT** has the battery of a 176,000-mile, ex-Uber Tesla Model 3 independently tested. So how much life is really left in it, how long can you expect the 'average' EV battery to last and what happens to it when it can no longer power the car? Some of the answers may surprise you

Electric cars have been in mainstream production for 14 years now, yet the question of how long batteries really last is still a sticking point for many consumers. That's understandable, given there remains some uncertainty about it. Yet ironically one of the reasons for this uncertainty is that the batteries which powered the Nissan Leaf, Renault Zoe and BMW i3 in those early years of EV production are still, well, powering Nissan Leafs, Renault Zoes and BMW i3s...

If you ask a manufacturer how long the battery will last in a new electric car, they will point to the eight-year/100,000-mile warranty that just about every maker offers (there or thereabouts) – and seldom venture any further estimate. It's also common knowledge that batteries are ferociously expensive to replace. All of which means it's perfectly understandable why battery longevity remains a concern.

So we found ourselves a high-mileage EV and took it for an independent test. The electric car in question is a 2021 Tesla Model 3 Long Range AWD, which has been well cared for but has nonetheless had a relentless existence as an Uber taxi and has covered 176,000 miles. Our independent tester is EV Experts in Hampshire – a used EV specialist that offers battery tests on all the vehicles it sells.

We dropped in with our very slightly cigarettey Tesla taxi and took advantage of their Moba battery-testing software and the staff who do these tests every day to find out how much battery life remained.

The result? Pretty impressive, actually. The Tesla had a usable lithium ion nickel-manganese-cobalt (NMC) battery capacity of 75kWh from new and it has retained 90% of its battery life after five epic years of non-stop budget ride-hailing duties. Probably even more impressive is that it has held on to that level of usable battery capacity despite having 45% of its charging cycles done on rapid chargers. Frequent DC rapid charging is known to accelerate battery degradation, so the Tesla really has stood up well to unusually high mileage and hard use. And we can also confirm that the 249 miles of combined real-world range that the Moba test suggests is spot on, if not a bit pessimistic.

What about 'average' battery degradation, then? And is age more significant than mileage?

Good questions. Data collated in 2024 from vehicle fleet analyst Geotab suggests that EV batteries lose around 1.8% capacity each year – depending on the vehicle's usage, the climate it's kept in and various other factors. This figure comes from an analysis of 5000 vehicles over 1.5 million days of data. It also suggests that battery tech has improved in terms of durability over the past five years because Geotab conducted the same analysis in 2019 and found an average 2.3% loss of battery capacity each year. That might seem a minor change, but an improvement of 22% is no small matter.

Obviously, that doesn't mean different usages and climates won't have an impact on battery life. Interestingly, Geotab's data shows that age has a bigger effect than mileage. Charlotte Argue, senior sustainability manager at Geotab, tells us: "From our observations, mileage does not have a significant impact on degradation rates. When looking at high-use and low-use vehicles that only use AC charging – not DC fast charging – age is a stronger factor. The vehicles exposed to a combination of frequent use of ▸

TESLA
Electric vehicle recharging point only
At any time
AF71 ONX

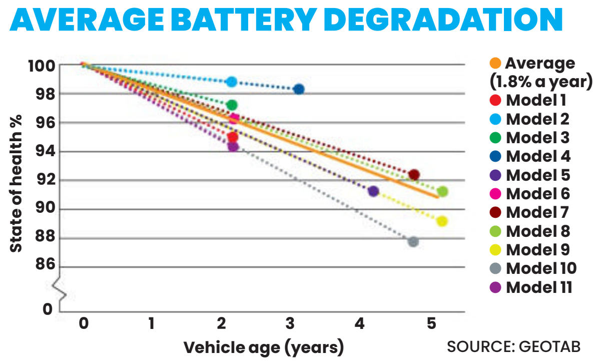
Our high-mileage Model 3 had done 45% of its charge cycles on rapid chargers

HOW IS A BATTERY RECYCLED?

If a battery needs to be recycled, rather than reused as a stationary energy storage unit or in any other second-life installation, it can be a complex process. It's well known that lithium ion batteries are prone to catching fire if the cell pack is compromised, which can then result in thermal runaway. This is where a chemical reaction in the battery cell causes it to catch fire, which can then progress in a chain reaction through other cells in the same pack. Essentially, a damaged battery can catch fire and burn for a very long time unless the battery fire is treated properly.

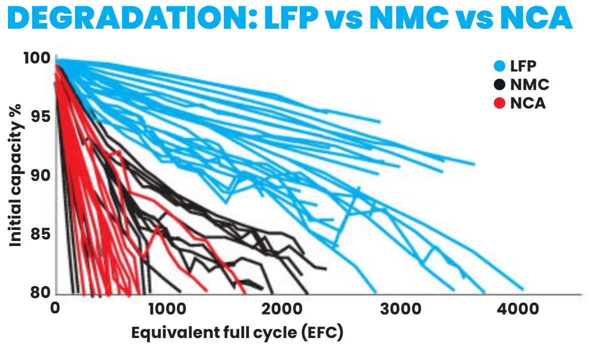
To get around this, the batteries being processed at the Recyclus plant are put through a 10-tonne shredder, which uses a rotor to crush the batteries before the parts can be separated into the 'black mass' that is sold on for reuse. But this all happens in an inert nitrogen-gas environment to prevent fires.

Recyclus crushes and shreds old batteries in an inert environment



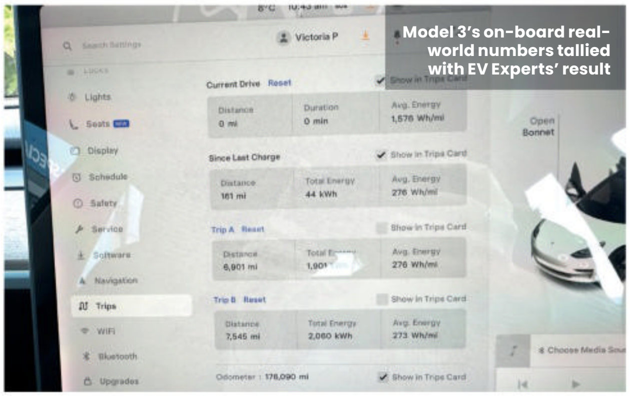
AVERAGE BATTERY DEGRADATION

SOURCE: GEOTAB



DEGRADATION: LFP vs NMC vs NCA

SOURCE: JOURNAL OF THE ELECTROCHEMICAL SOCIETY



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Distance 0 mi | Duration 0 min | Avg. Energy 1,576 Wh/mi

Since Last Charge ✓ Show in Trips Card
Distance 161 mi | Total Energy 44 kWh | Avg. Energy 276 Wh/mi

Trip A Reset ☐ Show in Trips Card
Distance 6,901 mi | Total Energy 1,901 | Avg. Energy 276 Wh/mi

Trip B Reset ☐ Show in Trips Card
Distance 7,545 mi | Total Energy 2,060 kWh | Avg. Energy 273 Wh/mi

Odometer : 176,090 mi ✓ Show in Trips Card

Model 3's on-board real-world numbers tallied with EV Experts' result

INDEPENDENT SPECIALISTS IN ELECT
Superb Driving Experience
Virtually silent, instant acceleration and a low centre of gravity make EVs great to drive.
Cheaper to Run & Maintain
An EV is cheaper to fuel, service, repair and tax than a conventionally fuelled vehicle.
Better for the Environment
AF71 ONX

Hampshire-based EV Experts offers battery tests of every EV it sells

"Age is a more pressing factor than mileage in battery degradation"

◂ high-power charging and that operate in hot climates tend to degrade the fastest on average."

Generally speaking, then, age is a more pressing factor than mileage when it comes to battery degradation. Otherwise, avoid rapid charging and try to keep your battery charge within 20% to 80% parameters when you don't need the full range and your battery could well outlive the car itself.

But what about lithium-iron-phosphate (LFP) batteries? These are commonplace in today's EVs and the different chemistry has a different effect on longevity. A study by the Journal of the Electrochemical Society back in 2020 suggests that LFP batteries perform better than NMC batteries over repeated charging cycles. While an NMC battery still retained roughly 85% of its usable capacity after 2000 cycles, the LFP battery degraded slower and retained 85% to 90% of its usable capacity after 3000 cycles.

There is also now an industry of EV specialist garages popping up, which can in many cases refurbish or replace faulty cells and deal with other EV-specific problems – often at similar prices to those you would face with an ICE vehicle issue. All of which factors into the support network that is helping to extend the life of the battery-electric vehicles (BEVs) on our roads. And we can all agree that keeping cars for longer – be they piston- or battery-powered – is the more environmental thing to do.

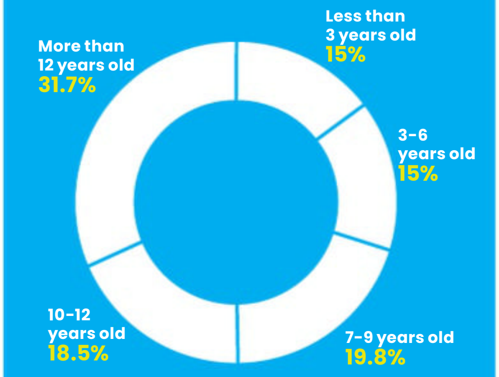
In fact, a recent study by experts at the London School of Economics and the University of Birmingham found that, based on data from MOT results, BEVs in the UK now have a lifespan of 18.4 years and 124,000 miles. The results are actually close to – and slightly outstripping – the average life of an ICE vehicle in the UK, which is currently put at 17 years and 123,000 miles.

But that's not the end of the story, because battery recycling isn't a simple process and nor is the proper dismantling and handling of an electric car. So we asked a few questions about that too, such as: how easy is it to recycle or reuse an electric car battery in the UK?

Battery recycling is another of those things we all know is a critical concern yet it seems to have been in a pilot phase for many years. To go back to our previous point about the batteries from early electric cars still largely being in the same electric cars, that's a good thing, because it means batteries are being used for a long time

HOW OLD IS THE AVERAGE CAR IN THE UK?

The UK's car fleet is getting older. The SMMT estimates that the average vehicle on our roads today is 9.5 years old – up from 9.3 years old in 2023, and a substantial rise from the eight-year-old average recorded in 2019. In fact, about half of the UK's car-buying public now drive cars over 10 years old.



SOURCE: SMMT

ELECTRIC VEHI
RIC CARS
Rapid Charging
Fast Charging
Trickle Charging

Battery certificate

Tesla Model 3 75 kWh

Battery status

90%

State of Health (SOH)

Manufacturer's warranty

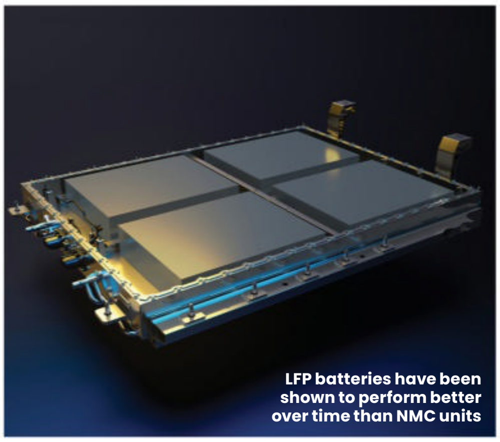
Range

Summer (25°C)

Winter (0°C)

moba

Moba battery test on this car should reassure other Model 3 owners



LFP batteries have been shown to perform better over time than NMC units

WHEN IS THE AVERAGE CAR SCRAPPED IN THE UK?

The average 'scrap' car in the UK is 17 years old and has just over 123,000 miles on the clock. The most scrapped car is the Ford Focus, but the most scrapped brand is Vauxhall, followed closely by Ford and Volkswagen.

in their original installations, which is beneficial both environmentally and economically.

But we do need industrial-scale battery recycling right now – for portable device batteries, as well as defunct or damaged electric vehicle packs – and we will most definitely need it much more as time goes on.

The UK's first dedicated battery recycling plant opened in Wolverhampton in 2023. Part of the Recyclus Group, the LiBatt facility "is fully permitted to process up to 22,000 tonnes of waste per year", according to Recyclus Group co-founder Robin Brundle. Currently, the company processes around 8300 tonnes per year as it's running a single-shift pattern.

Brundle says: "The market is already experiencing sustained expansion. In the UK, initial [government battery recycling] targets are expected to be met by 2031, with further increases planned for 2036 – reinforcing our expectation of ongoing, rising demand for advanced lithium ion battery recycling solutions. We've secured agreements with leading industry players, including Glencore, to further process and reintroduce these critical materials back into the battery manufacturing supply chain. We also recover ferrous and non-ferrous metals, copper and plastics, which are resold within the UK to support a range of industries."

It's easy to see why battery recycling firms such as Recyclus are focused on the future, because that's very much where the money is. It's estimated that demand for lithium ion battery cells will rise from 700 gigawatt-hours (GWh) in 2022 to 4.7 terawatt-hours by 2030. The market value is expected to rise equally sharply – from $48 billion (£36bn) to $228bn (£172bn) by 2030.

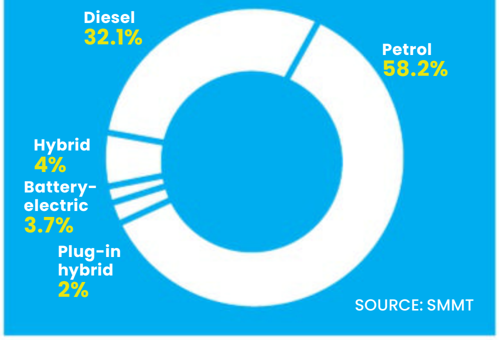
Basically, the materials taken from recycled batteries can be reused in new batteries with no reduction in performance, so there are huge environmental and financial incentives to reclaim and properly reuse the valuable metals. That's not to say that the battery recycling ecosystem doesn't have big hurdles to jump. These include transporting batteries (which is expensive and difficult to do safely) and effectively 'triaging' batteries – figuring out whether a defunct or crash-damaged battery is better off being recycled or reused.

But there is no doubt that we will need batteries to be properly recycled and that will come down to companies like Recyclus, and the vehicle manufacturers, which are legally obligated to recover and recycle at least 50% of the battery materials that they sell.

The Advanced Propulsion Centre estimates that "by 2040, recycled battery waste from end-of-life vehicles and manufacturing waste could supply enough cathode materials to produce 60GWh of new batteries". Such progress will surely be needed given how widespread EV ownership is likely to be 15 years from now. ◼

HOW MANY ELECTRIC CARS ARE ON THE ROAD IN THE UK?

The number of cars on the UK's roads reached a new high in 2024, with 36.16 million passenger cars in use – up by 1.3% (or 470,556 cars) on 2023. Of those, 1.953m were new registrations in 2024, and 19.6% of those new sales were battery-electric vehicles. That's 381,970 BEVs, by the way. And 2024 was also the year when the UK's fleet of EVs passed the million mark. There are now more than 1.3m BEVs in use around Britain.



SOURCE: SMMT

Take M or leave M

BMW's new M2 CS (p4) is the stuff of petrolhead dreams – but there's a whole world of fantastic used alternatives. **CHARLIE MARTIN** explores it

Maserati Coupé 2002-2007, £5000-£25,000

Let's ignore for a moment all the clichés about Italian reliability. If you've got M2 CS money, you can probably afford to run a Maserati with a highly strung Ferrari V8.

Thanks to a crossplane crank, it's more muscular in its sound than you might first anticipate, with burbles aplenty on the overrun. So it's a tantalising prospect, especially when you consider that you can get in the finest examples for £20,000. That leaves plenty in the coffers for the inevitable bills...

Mercedes C63 AMG

2008-2015, £30,000-£50,000

As AMG gradually transitions itself away from a madhouse and into a more clean-cut, technology-led brand, there has never been a better time to grab one of its greatest hits.

Few embody the absurdity of Mercedes' in-house tuner with greater clarity than the W204-generation C63, whose 6.2-litre V8 was utterly slab-like in its power delivery and made short work of rear tyres. It's fairly reliable too.

Grab a clean example for £20k and you will be howling all the way to your local Kwik Fit.

BMW 1 Series M

2011-2012, £30,000-£50,000

The M2's grandfather was never granted proper M car status, but that doesn't really matter, because it drives exactly as a blue-blooded Beemer should. In no small part that's thanks to its fundamentals, with 335bhp sent through its rear wheels via a proper manual gearbox and a limited-slip differential. It's a simple recipe yet utterly delicious: a kind of twin-turbocharged omelette.

Well-worn examples start around £30,000. Also consider the milder (but still brilliant) 135i version for less than £10,000.

Nissan GT-R

2007-2025, £35,000-£120,000

There's an argument to be made that the 'R35' GT-R marks the line in the sand between olde-worlde performance cars and modern ones, having been among the first supercar-slayers to use trickery like torque vectoring and electronic driver aids to disguise its heft (all 1.7 tonnes of it).

Tread carefully around anything heavily modified, and gearboxes can be problematic. Still, with prices starting at just £35k, it remains every bit the bargain it was in the late 2000s.

Ferrari 599 2006-2012, £60,000-£120,000

If you needed a reminder of just how much new cars cost nowadays, consider that you could have one of Maranello's V12-powered thoroughbreds instead of BMW's latest junior coupé. Sure, it will drink more than a Sunday league team and cost a fortune to maintain, but those are small prices to pay for one of the most exciting road cars ever built.

Also consider that values have already bottomed out and now look to be climbing.

Toyota GT86 **2012-2021, £7500-£20,000**

If you're looking for thrills on the cheap, few do it better than the *hachi-roku*. Around £12,000 is enough to get you behind the wheel of a pre-facelift low-miler, and that's a small price to pay for one of the all-time great chassis.

Should you want a bit more shove from it (as many do), the good news is that there's also an incredibly healthy aftermarket offering superchargers, turbochargers and even full-on engine transplants.

Lexus LC 500 **2017-, £50,000-£85,000**

If you can forgo the M2's practicality, this Japanese grand tourer is entirely worthy of consideration. It's old-school in all the best ways, with a thumping 5.0-litre V8, arrow-like proportions and more than enough entertainment on offer.

And unlike alternatives from Jaguar and Aston Martin, the LC is backed by its maker's legendary reputation for reliability. You could argue it's more exotic, too, on the grounds of rarity.

Get an earlier, higher-mileage car from £50,000.

BMW 330i

2004-2013, LESS THAN £10,000

Just £3000 is enough to snag this underrated gem. The 'E92' has got all the right ingredients: a naturally aspirated 3.0-litre straight six, rear-wheel drive and a soft-edged, swooping body.

The ideal choice is a car in the softer-riding SE trim with the slick six-speed manual gearbox, but that combination is rather rare. As such, it's also worth considering the automatic – still plenty responsive on the paddles – as well as the 'E90' saloon or 'E91' estate. All offer tremendous satisfaction for the money.

LIVING WITH A...

Where our long-term test cars have been and what they've done

> "I'm excited to see if the Duster lives up to my self-imposed hype"

FIRST REPORT

DACIA DUSTER

Is Dacia's third-gen SUV really too good to be true? Let's find out

WHY WE'RE RUNNING IT To see if a sub-£27,000 price tag really does give you all the car you'll ever need

We Brits love a bargain. Seeking them out has become our cost-of-living-crisis national pastime. Walk down any high street (yes, they do still exist) or scour the supermarket aisles and you'll see the buy-one-get-one-free, three-for-two, 50%-off rollback price-match offers at every turn. Yet these deals often aren't quite what they seem, so you have to shop with your eyes wide open to make real savings.

So when a genuine value-for-money proposition comes around, we're right to be sceptical – as I was the first time I saw how much, or rather how little, Dacia was asking for the new Duster. Here was a genuinely good-looking car priced new – in 2025 – at under £20,000. What's the catch?

Apparently there isn't one. So now here I am, standing in parent group Renault's London West dealership near Richmond waiting for the covers to be pulled off 'my' new Duster. To say I'm excited would be somewhat understating matters. I've owned many cars over the years, all of which have been second-hand, so the 'handover' such as it was tended to involve a set of keys being slid across a desk after a (relatively modest) payment had been approved. So all this fuss and palaver makes me feel quite special.

I arrived here about an hour ago and was treated to the full customer experience, including a guided tour through the different colours, trims, options and extras. But now is the moment I've been waiting for: seeing my Duster. Covers off and I'm delighted: it looks so good in the metal, and that Sandstone paintwork is beautiful.

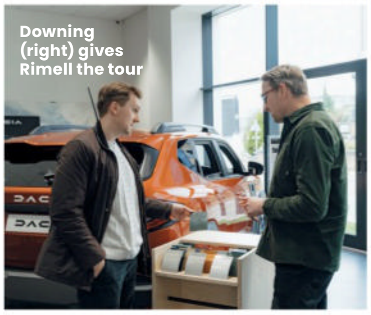
When the Duster was launched at the end of last year, the uplift from the second-generation model was quite staggering. But, given the low price tag, I remained sceptical of how that would translate in the real world. But the Duster truly holds its own up close: it has a real curb presence, and while I wouldn't go as far as saying it could outdo a Defender in this respect, there's a similar feeling of awe here.

Our Duster is in mid-range Journey trim, which means we get a 10.1in infotainment screen with wireless Apple CarPlay/Android Auto and built-in nav, a 7.0in driver's display, cloth seats (with Journey's blue jeans-coloured accents) and some black cladding. Trim-specific features include automatic air-con, four-way parking cameras and 18in alloys. You'll need to pay an extra £800 for top-rung Expression trim for heated seats and a modular roof rack (for bike storage and such).

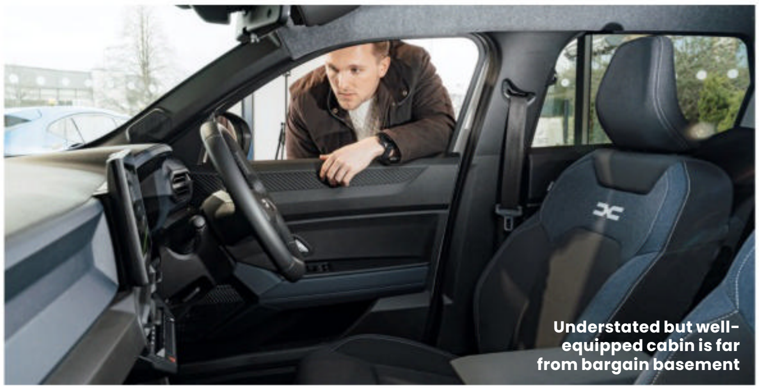
Our Duster has a hybrid set-up that combines a 1.6-litre four-cylinder petrol engine with an electric motor and a starter-generator to send 138bhp and 151lb ft to the front wheels and which can achieve a claimed –

SECOND OPINION

Switching from the Bentayga to Will's Duster was quite the dichotomy. Still, even without the luxury to which I've recently become accustomed, the Duster was an excellent companion on a trip to Dorset. It confirmed everything I've thought of Dacias in recent times: no frills, practical, well equipped and charming. **RB**



Downing (right) gives Rimell the tour



Understated but well-equipped cabin is far from bargain basement

Ta-da! Even price-savvy Dacia customers are made to feel a bit special

Tasty 18in alloys come as part of our car's Journey trim

and rather impressive – 55.4mpg.

Dacia also offers a full 4x4 variant with the less powerful mild-hybrid powertrain. I plan to borrow one and do some off-Tarmac activities, so stay tuned.

Anyway, the most important figure is what all this costs. Our Duster chimes the till at £26,700, which isn't so cheap any more, but the value position remains. There is a lot of car here, and you'd be hard-pressed to find anything of this size and with a comparable powertrain for the same price.

An entry-level Nissan Qashqai with its e-Power set-up starts at £34,860, while a similarly sized Skoda Kamiq costs about the same as the Duster, but only as a 1.0-litre manual. That £26,700 – around £350 a month over four years with £3k or so down – isn't looking so bad now.

I'm eager to learn more about the Duster. I'm shown around by product performance manager Matt Downing. "It really is a great-looking thing, isn't it?" he says. It's hard to argue. I'm a big fan of the SUV's more rugged elements – especially the raised Toyota Land Cruiser-esque beltline. The new Dacia nose, which was introduced in 2023, looks great here, too.

Downing points out that the Y-shaped design of the headlights is repeated throughout the car, from the air vents to the door handles – a cool touch. He also explains what the odd square protrusions are for (one caught my eye to the right of the infotainment screen): they're part of the YouClip accessory system, which means I can attach a phone holder, a cupholder or a bag at any of the five points (seven with optional headrest attachment added) throughout the cabin. Neat. I've got a few accessories on order…

I'm now excited to spend some proper time with the Duster to see if it lives up to my self-imposed hype. My calendar is filling up, with long slogs up the M4 and a trip to the New Forest already planned.

Excitement really is building for living with what could well be the best automotive bargain on the market. I do love a bargain.

WILL RIMELL

TEST DATA

DACIA DUSTER HYBRID 140 JOURNEY

Price new £26,050 **Price as tested** £26,700 **Options** Metallic paint £650 **Faults** None **Expenses** None **Economy** 55.4mpg (WLTP)

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will.rimell@haymarket.com

Economical 2.0 TDI and a decent-size tank give the Superb an 800-mile range

SKODA SUPERB

Impromptu Euro tour confirms our big wagon's credentials

MILEAGE 11,654
WHY WE'RE RUNNING IT To see whether this big new estate really is a flawless family hauler

Having somehow spent no time at all in the current-generation Superb, I've just put 1720 miles on our long-termer in a week. How did that happen? I'd initially planned to get the Eurostar to Paris to interview Renault Group CTO Philippe Krief, but then Aston told us it would be launching the Vantage Roadster in Salzburg later that same week. The clear play, then, was to link the jobs by road: car beats train beats plane.

I scanned the Autocar fleet for an accomplice. Prise the Bentayga from Rachel? Tempting. But the V8's fuel economy might put the publisher out of business. Steve's Wrangler? Similar story, only with ride quality as rough as a bear's backside. I thought Kris's BMW 120 M Sport might be interesting, because these premium hatchbacks are now so grown-up that they've got decent touring chops.

But then I remembered our 2.0 TDI Superb Estate, which put the matter to bed. A couple of months ago I drove the new Merc E450d Estate to the Alps. The German is a colossus – in performance, price and capability. It also costs £90k if you get the spec you want, which is more than twice the price of our Superb SE L after options. But is the Mercedes double the car?

LOVE IT

TOTAL ANONYMITY
Estates this massive generally come from premium brands and look expensive even in a subtle spec. The Skoda is smart but totally inconspicuous.

LOATHE IT

DISPLAY DISPLEASURE
It's a five-star car so nothing to loathe, but I wouldn't mind a slightly smaller central display.

Objectively no, of course not. The Superb has the same number of seats and a bigger boot, will slickly run Android Auto or Apple CarPlay and wins a clear victory in efficiency. Where the E450d, with its 369lb ft six-pot turbo diesel, will return 45mpg at a 75mph cruise, the four-pot Skoda does 55mpg at 85mph. With a 66-litre tank, that's 798 unbroken miles in just over nine hours, versus 697 miles in the Merc, with a little longer in the hot seat. The Superb crunches big distances. This latest one has decent chairs, too, plus generous adjustability in the steering column, so it really is comfortable.

I'd also say the Skoda has an easier cabin to rub along with. It is not lavish, but the E-Class has an awful lot of digital real estate, which I've never liked, especially at night. The Skoda settles well on the motorway too, helped by its wheelbase and the lack of a need to be 'sporty'. All that being said, money-no-object I'd take the Merc in a heartbeat. It's one of the great tool cars of this era. But if money mattered, I'd feel pretty pleased with myself if I had a Superb.

RICHARD LANE

TEST DATA

SKODA SUPERB 2.0 TDI SE L ESTATE

Price new £39,705 **Price as tested** £41,675 **Faults** None **Expenses** None **Economy** 56.5mpg **Last seen** 7.5.25

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BENTLEY BENTAYGA

App issues cause unexpected consequences, but luxury conquers all

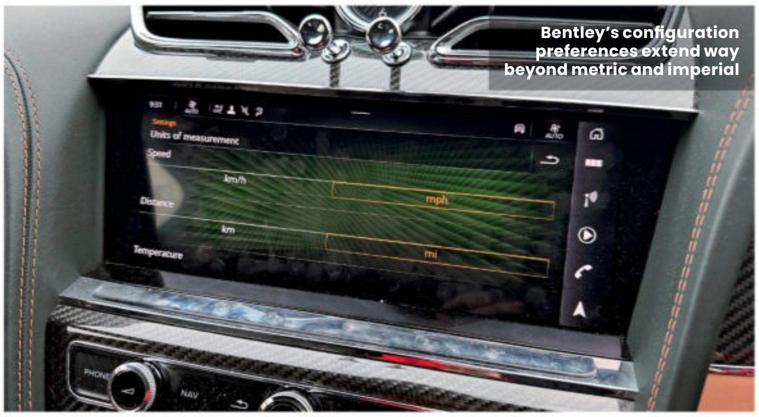
MILEAGE 16,568
WHY WE'RE RUNNING IT In facelifted form, is this SUV still the pinnacle of British luxury motoring?

I was driving on a 40mph dual carriageway not far from my house recently, when I realised I was doing quite a bit more than 40mph just as I approached a speed camera. I was surprised by my speed, and immediately after that came the sinking feeling of existential dread: a stern call from Bentley, points on my licence and all the shameful regret that follows.

Later that day I was on a 20mph road, which I'm sure most of you will agree is a hard speed to maintain, but I stuck to it. I was overtaken by a couple of drivers and assumed they were being extra-aggressive in the presence of a matt-orange Bentley SUV.

I was slightly perplexed by all of this and thought how true it is that when driving a powerful car, speeds feel lower than they are.

Just the day before, I had spent more time than I would have liked trying to set up the Bentley app and create a personal profile in the car. I'm hardly a technophile, but it's safe to say this was not an intuitive experience, and despite receiving an ambiguous email some hours later that 'A Contact Centre agent has Confirmed a VIN using the admin tool', the app now still says I need to add a VIN...



Bentley's configuration preferences extend way beyond metric and imperial

Settings
Units of measurement
Speed: km/h, mph
Distance: km, mi
Temperature

How do these disparate stories relate? Well, in trying to create my profile, my preferences had somehow switched from mph to kph. Relief: I was doing 37mph in the 40mph zone and just 12mph in the 20mph zone. No wonder I was being overtaken...

In an effort to revert the units of speed back to the UK standard I took a deep dive into the various settings screens on the infotainment system. Along the way, I came across a few other highlights, including the ability to change the mood lighting.

You might already know I'm not the biggest fan of such things, and having purple lighting in an orange car with an orange and dark green interior isn't really my bag. All is well, though: I can pick (almost) any colour and its corresponding brightness, plus whether I want it in the footwells or not. I went for a dark orange to complement the main colour scheme.

Despite the app foibles (which I haven't since tried to resolve), my overall impression of the infotainment is a positive one, and I feel the same about the interior.

This V8 S was created with the specific intent of injecting some driving dynamism over the standard Bentayga, but you can never ignore Bentley's impressive interiors, which form a key part of the owner experience by reinforcing the sense of super-luxury that buyers in this market are seeking.

Alongside the easy-to-use infotainment, this is an incredibly comfortable, cosseting place to be. It's all high quality. I've always enjoyed the hand-stitched steering wheel – I've been lucky enough to see them being created on a visit to Bentley's Crewe factory a few years ago – and the silver diamond knurling on various touchpoints is something of a Bentley trademark.

For all the praise, there was a stark realisation coming from an Audi A3 to the Bentayga: there's very little difference in the steering wheel controls, and that doesn't feel very special in a car that costs five times more than the other. Inevitably there are both ample benefits and the odd trip hazard when you're part of the gargantuan Volkswagen Group.

RACHEL BURGESS

LOVE IT

FEEL-GOOD FACTOR

The general sense of luxury and feeling of comfort in the driving seat make the Bentayga special to get into every time.

LOATHE IT

FEELING THE STRAIN

The general sense of jeopardy one feels driving a large, orange £250k SUV, whether it be from the wrath of others or simply negotiating narrow urban roads.

TEST DATA

BENTLEY BENTAYGA V8 S

Price new £197,300 **Price as tested** £258,185 **Faults** None **Expenses** None **Economy** 22.3mpg **Last seen** 30.4.25

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BMW 1 SERIES

It's true love, but some quirks have been giving the ick

MILEAGE 2500
WHY WE'RE RUNNING IT To see how much progress BMW has made with its entry hatch between generations

The new pope is Catholic, the UK won nul points in Eurovision's public vote and, in other truly shocking news, I have fallen in love with a small sporty car.

I must admit that it hasn't been all sunshine and rainbows between me and my BMW 120. There have been a couple of disagreements. But as with all healthy relationships, we have agreed on some compromises. Or rather, I have made some compromises to suit its demands…

The first disagreement involved the other (true) love in my life. Whenever we got in the car together, she would have to stand on the pavement waiting for me to open my door, sit down and press the unlock button before she could follow suit. Why? The key fob unlocks only the one door, and trying to change this to all four doors within the touchscreen menu prompts the message: 'Function only available with BMW ID'.

LOVE IT

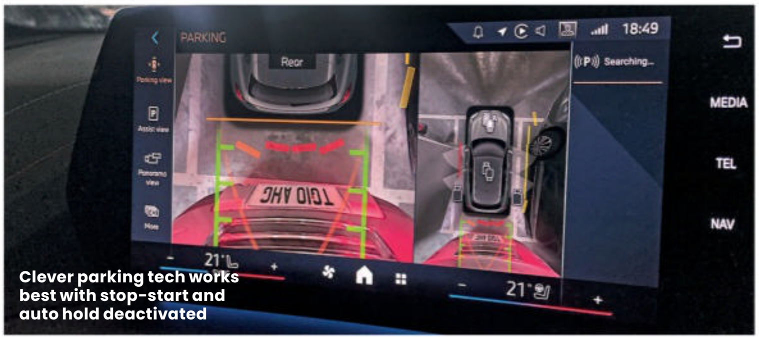
MUSIC TO MY EARS

The optional Harman Kardon stereo is well worth the £550. It sounds fabulous.

LOATHE IT

TAPPING OUT

I have to tap away at the touchscreen before every journey to deactivate the lane keeping assistance – not that BMW is to blame for that.



Clever parking tech works best with stop-start and auto hold deactivated

Yes, to change this fairly basic – and fundamental – setting, I first have to hand over my personal data to a monolithic corporation. My colleagues have noted this with other BMWs and Minis, and none of us likes it. My girlfriend works in the tech industry and always says "if you don't have to pay for something, you're paying for it with personal data", but in this case I have already (in theory) paid £43,000 for the something in question.

BMW may well claim that the purpose of the ID is the easy transfer of a driver's personal preferences between cars, and that indeed is a potential boon for repeat customers. But as far as I'm concerned, no function should ever be locked behind a data gate. But anyway, I gave BMW my name and email address and now I can share the wonders of central locking with my passengers. Such is life nowadays.

The second compromise I've made concerns parking. I was really struggling when trying to parallel or bay park slowly into a tight spot, because if the car came to a halt when in reverse, it would require a daft amount of accelerator pedal travel to bring the engine back to life.

So I go into yet another on-screen menu to deactivate the engine stop-start and auto hold functions, and suddenly parking has never been easier – not least because my car is equipped with a military-grade arsenal of parking aids (part of the £2750 Technology Plus Pack).

I would have been happy with audible sensors alone, but there's also a camera suite that offers me top-down and panoramic views with coloured proximity indicators and even curved lines that change as I move the steering wheel – not to mention a system that will automatically drive the car into a bay or parallel space if I want it to. I tried this and was impressed – although I did chicken out and hit the brakes before the car adjudged the manoeuvre to be complete.

You can fall in love quickly, but it takes time to build trust, I guess.
KRIS CULMER

TEST DATA

BMW 120 M SPORT

Price new £32,775 **Price as tested** £43,190 **Faults** None **Expenses** None **Economy** 44.9mpg **Last seen** 14.5.25

SHARE YOUR EXPERIENCE
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Culmer has been getting to know his long-termer better – and vice versa

SNAPSHOTS

RENAULT SCENIC

Mileage 5443 **Last seen** 14.5.25
The Scenic's Google-powered route planner was helpful over three days of frantic motorway work: the set-up works out which chargers require the least deviation from your route, tells you how long to stay plugged in and adjusts your ETA and remaining charge forecast to suit. It can't tell you how fast a charger is running, though, so I arrived at my destinations a bit later than planned. **FP**

FORD EXPLORER

Mileage 3128 **Last seen** 14.5.25
There's nothing glamorous about a charging cable, but credit to Ford for putting some thought into the one provided with the Explorer. It's bright yellow for one thing, which makes it easier to spot and therefore less of a trip hazard when plugged into the bollard charger near my house. It also comes in a nice stiffened fabric bag, which makes it easy to pack away in the dedicated space under the boot floor. **JA**

JEEP WRANGLER

Mileage 15,956 **Last seen** 14.5.25
One certain way of knowing you really like a car is that you're glad to get back into it, whatever else you've been driving. This is always the case with the Jeep: I've driven it recently straight after a Polestar 3, a Volvo EX30, an Alpine A110 and a Mini Cooper S. The cheerful persona is the appeal; other full-on 4x4s just seem too aspirational. **SC**

USED CARS

HOW TO BUY AN AUDI E-TRON GT

THE ELECTRIC DREAM GT THAT COULD BE WITHIN REACH

Audi's slick – and very quick – E-tron is now temptingly affordable

The Audi E-tron GT is far more than a Porsche Taycan in different clothes. The two share their J1 architecture and near-identical proportions, but while the sportier Porsche's goal is driver appeal, Audi's flagship EV plays the role of electric grand tourer.

The softer-edged E-tron GT was launched in 2021 and cost around £85,000 new, or closer to £100k with options. Depreciation hasn't been kind on the E-tron, though, which means you can now snap up Audi's elegant electric GT for a scarcely believable £30,000. Older Taycans are now going for similar cash, and you can pick up a Tesla Model S for even less money – but Ingolstadt's EV exec could be the smarter buy.

The Audi feels every bit the premium proposition inside, decked out with gleaming polished metals, plush leather and a brace of crisp digital displays. Unlike the screen-first Taycan and Tesla, though, the Audi's cockpit majors on tactile appeal and ergonomics, with its glossy screens complemented by conventional button-operated climate controls that are far easier to operate on the move.

The Audi doesn't offer more space than the Taycan, but even with its rakish roofline there's plenty of room inside. Taller passengers might find the rear a little snug, but most cars have been optioned with a panoramic roof, which makes the cabin feel airy. The boot holds just 405 litres and the opening is narrow, but it's easy to fold the seats and slip your skis/clubs/rods in.

Unlike the Taycan, the E-tron GT came exclusively with a dual-

Interior is roomy enough and well appointed, with a distinct premium feel

motor, four-wheel-drive powertrain producing 469bhp as standard, or 523bhp with launch control activated for a 0-62mph time of just 4.1sec. If, mystifyingly, you find that too sedate, consider the 590bhp RS E-tron GT: activate its launch control and power jumps to 637bhp for 0-62mph in a blistering 3.3sec. That's impressive in anything, never mind a 2.3-tonne saloon.

Full-bore launches, though, will quickly drain the battery, but the E-tron has plenty of tricks up its sleeve to keep range anxiety at bay. As standard, it's fitted with a 93kWh battery, which gives the entry-level E-tron GT Quattro a 298-mile range (283 miles in the RS). You're more likely to achieve 230-240 miles in the real world, and while that's some way off the Model S (350 miles), it's better than an entry-level Taycan, which can return only around 220 miles from its smaller 79kWh battery. You can get the Taycan with the same 93kWh battery, but a tidy 2021 dual-motor 4S (with similar performance to the Audi) that has covered around 20,000 miles will cost you around £3000-£4000 more than an equivalent E-tron GT.

Because the Audi inherited the Taycan's 800V architecture, it can charge at up to 270kW, which means a 10-80% boost takes only around 25 minutes. You'll barely have time to grab a coffee if you stop and charge at a motorway services (with a suitably quick charger), and such speeds mean you'll feel comfortable doing longer journeys, too.

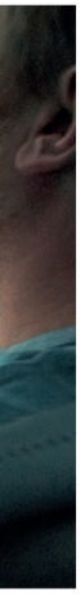
In fact, it's on these longer road trips where the E-tron comes into its own. It hides its mass incredibly well, with a 50:50 weight distribution endowing it with impressive balance and agility. Sure, it's not as dynamic as the Porsche, and its steering lacks a bit of communication, but as we said when we tested the car in 2021: "The Audi rides with a luxurious plushness befitting its remit."

SAM PHILLIPS

What we said then

3 MARCH 2021

"Given how closely related the E-tron GT is to the Porsche Taycan, it would be easy to assume this was just a cynical exercise in badge engineering. Yet the real surprise is that the more time you spend with the Audi, the more you realise the brand's engineers have imbued it with its own distinct character. Steer clear of many of the options and the E-tron GT is a hugely capable and likeable car, one that signals an all-electric future is something to be embraced rather than feared."



The E-tron is a heavy car, but it's agile and very well balanced

"The four-wheel-drive powertrain makes 469bhp as standard, or 523bhp with launch control"

How to get one in your garage

AN OWNER'S VIEW

DUSAN PRASTALO

"I've owned a 2022 E-tron GT since July last year and love its stunning looks, high-quality interior and smooth, powerful drive. Despite initial hesitation about battery longevity, I was won over by the design. It's comfortable, has good range (260-280 miles) and solid efficiency (up to 3.9mpkWh). There were a few early issues – recalls, a brief SOS fault, noisy brakes and rattling plastic trim. Surprisingly, build quality doesn't feel as premium as on my older Audi TT and A1. Still, I enjoy the driving experience and performance, though Audi could have done better with traditional quality details like door feel and cabin refinement."

BUYER BEWARE...

■ DRIVETRAIN

Watch out for the dreaded dead throttle pedal, especially after coming to a stop at traffic lights. Turning the car on and off again can cure the issue, but a software update should stop it recurring – check the car's history to see if this has been done. Some 2023 cars were recalled due to battery fire risk, so check to make sure that has been done too.

■ GEARBOX

Watch out for the 'Drive system malfunction' message on the dash – various issues can cause it. Worst case is the car will need a new gearbox and coolant system, which can fail, but a software update can sometimes cure it.

■ TYRES

Big EVs with oodles of power generally get through tyres quickly so check the wide, 265-section rubber. A set of four can easily set you back £1000.

■ BRAKES

A long brake pedal or fluctuating pressure could mean brake module failure. Replacement costs vary, but a new servo is between £600 and £1000.

Make sure the brake hoses have been repaired, particularly if you're looking at a 2022-24 car. Front axle hoses could tear, leading to brake failure.

■ ELECTRICS

Cameras and infotainment screens are susceptible to software glitches. Dealer updates should cure them. Same applies to the rear spoiler, which can sometimes fail to deploy.

'Electrical system fault. Safely stop the vehicle' is a warning message you don't want to see. It could mean the front motor is leaking coolant and needs replacing – it can cost around £10k if you don't have a warranty.

ALSO WORTH KNOWING

E-trons need servicing at a dealer or specialist every two years or 20,000 miles, whichever is first.

The standard Goodyear Eagle F1s are tailored towards efficiency, so if you want a bit more grip you might consider swapping them for Michelin Pilot Sport 4s.

E-tron GTs are available in Vorsprung trim; RS versions come in Carbon Black, which adds sporty black styling, or range-topping Carbon Vorsprung, which has a carbonfibre roof and Alcantara cabin trim.

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Mileage and age varies, so shop around. Easy to find a low-mileage car for around £50k.

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More RS cars available alongside low-mile GTs in a high trim level.

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ONE WE FOUND

AUDI E-TRON GT 93.4KWH QUATTRO, 2021, 33,000 MILES, £38,990

This 33k-mile example looks like a bargain. Only one previous owner and in excellent condition, it also has the panoramic roof.

My car & I

Understated Audi is a rev-happy weapon

In this magazine's road test of the 2010-15 Audi RS5, our testers noted that, but for some subtly flared wheel arches and a restyled front bumper, few would know the car was the most prestigious sports model in the German marque's range. Ditto the interior, which, it said, looked to be pretty much straight out of any A5 cabin.

None of this bothers RS5 owner Neville Greenhalgh (pronounced Greenhoush). "I love that people don't know what it is or what's under the bonnet," he says. "Only when you open the taps up do they put two and two together. It looks special but doesn't shout its potential."

He bought his RS5, registered in 2012, from a specialist two years ago: "I'd been looking for a 'B7' RS4 [2006-08] but couldn't find one for my budget. Then my brother told me to look at an RS5, which he reckoned had a better engine, transmission and electronics. I looked at a few, and what would become mine – in Sprint Blue, a rare colour for the RS5 – leapt out."

Neville's car, an automatic, is powered by a 4.2-litre V8 putting out 444bhp, which appears just 100rpm shy of the engine's 8500rpm redline. "I've taken it up there a few times and it absolutely screams, but it pulls strongly from low revs and

Our cars

Hankered-for hot Golf is Jack's morning glory

BY JACK WARRICK

Few things are more exciting for a petrolhead than opening the curtains in the morning and seeing your car bathing in the sunlight on your driveway. I haven't actually had a car to call my own since 2018 (unforgivable for a car-lover, I know), and that early-morning feeling was one I'd missed, so when the perfect car appeared in my dream specification, of course I had to go for it.

Meet the latest member of the Autocar fleet: my 2017 Volkswagen Golf GTI, in pure White. The Mk7.5 GTI is a car I've wanted to own for years, and despite this one having 96,000 miles on the clock, it's in remarkably good condition. A full history inspired confidence, as did its pristine tartan interior. Vital under-the-bonnet work and new parts, including a new water pump, clutch and brakes all round, sealed the deal.

It drives like new, and the manual gearbox feels slick and precise – but the car isn't perfect. The diamond-cut alloys have a case of 'white worm', so they need to be refurbished, and the paintwork has rough patches and scuffs so needs a tidy-up. A set of Michelin Pilot Sport 4 tyres were included in the sale, and once I've swapped these for the Cross Climates it's wearing now, it will be ready for the summer.

Resplendent in the dawn light, but the GTI needs some cosmetic tidying

Cabin is in the Audi identikit mould, but it's very well put together

Left: Neville fitted Reyland brake discs and Ferodo pads for use on the track

> **"Race mode is perfect for the track: very stiff-riding and with a hair-trigger throttle"**

cruises on a whisper of throttle," he says. That last attribute is useful given that Neville often finds himself driving to Scotland from Surrey to visit relatives: "I don't need much persuading. It's as much a joy to drive on the M6 as it is along the country roads in Ayrshire."

Neville, who has worked for Porsche and Mercedes and who currently works for McLaren, is not afraid to tweak the car where necessary. "I was going to take it on a track day, but AMD, the specialist garage I use for jobs I can't do myself, said the brakes would be cooked in less than two laps," he says. "So I went on the forums to identify better ones and chose Reyland race discs with Ferodo pads, which I fitted."

Emboldened by this mod, Neville bought a second-hand Eventuri air intake, which he painted before also installing. He says: "With the intake fitted, the engine now makes a bit more induction noise – which I like – and breathes better. It hasn't increased the power, but the engine has enough of that already."

Neville is a bit of an Audi fan. His daily driver is a 'B7' A4 2.0T: "I've worked around many brands and Audi is my favourite in terms of build quality, although, like so many cars these days, later models are more built to a price to enable the extra technologies and safety kit to be included without making them unaffordable."

Back to his RS5, and things he loves about the car are its performance, handling and ride comfort. "The adaptive suspension, which I usually set in automatic mode, copes with most things," he adds. "I take it to the Spa Classic every May and went for a third time with friends this year. We drive our cars on the track, for which the RS5's Race mode is perfect: very stiff-riding and with a hair-trigger throttle response. Whether on the road or the track, it does everything I want apart from drink fuel like there's no tomorrow. Still, it's smiles to the gallon and fun all the way!"

JOHN EVANS

Head to head

WILL RIMELL

2011 JAGUAR XJ L 5.0 V8 SUPERSPORT

VS

FELIX PAGE

2009 VOLKSWAGEN TOUAREG R50

Brief: Find an unassuming Q-car for no more than £15,000

FP What can I say? By shoehorning a Goliath V10 into a relatively staid family SUV, giving it Boxster-baiting pace and enough torque to tow a jumbo jet, Volkswagen created perhaps the definitive Q-car in the Touareg R50. Although the 'Q' stands for 'queueing at the petrol station'. This 2009 car is an absolute steal at £11,500, though.

WR If we're talking unassuming, how about a stately Jaguar XJ with the 503bhp 5.0-litre supercharged V8 from the XKR? There were a few under £15,000 in the classifieds, and I couldn't say no to the full long-wheelbase Prime Minister spec, could I? Black, wood interior trim – and all for £12,995. I'm going to get a chauffeur with the leftover £2000.

FP There's much to be said for a whining, cackling V8 Jag – especially as we'll never see their like again. But VW only made 350 R50s, so mine is more exclusive.

WR Fair point. But who would guess to look at it that this XJ could clear 0-62mph in 4.9sec – almost two seconds faster than the R50? That, surely, is the definition of a Q-car.

FP Oof. Mind my Bollinger, Jeeves. The best Q-car here, though, is the one that could slip unnoticed into the office car park but pull the whole building down on the way back out if you've had a bad day.

CAUGHT IN THE CLASSIFIEDS

BMW M140i
2017, 52,000 miles, £16,250
This immaculate M140i is one very hot hatch. With a 335bhp B58 six-pot, it's quicker than Jack's Golf (bottom left), and rear-wheel drive adds character. It has a full history and the six-speed manual for additional driver appeal.

HONDA CIVIC 2.0 i-VTEC TYPE R GT
2017, 49,500 miles, £23,499
The FK8 Type R is one of the best hot hatches thanks to its snickety manual 'box and lively VTEC motor. This one has done less than 50k miles and looks to be in exceptional nick inside and out. We'd buy it for those red suede sports seats alone.

SEAT LEON CUPRA 300
2017, 54,000 miles, £15,400
This unassuming Leon hatch is in fact a 300bhp Cupra 300 with a sub-6.0sec 0-60mph time. The 2017 car has had four previous owners, but it has only done 54k miles and is packed full of kit such as Apple CarPlay and adaptive cruise control.

FORD FOCUS 2.0T ECOBOOST ST-2
2017, 43,000 miles, £13,988
The 247bhp Focus ST is a riot on a twisty B-road. We love the Race Red paint, and it's mint inside, with no signs of wear on the figure-hugging – and brilliant – Recaro seats.

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The Autocar Lost in the archive

The 1960 duel between Jim Rathmann and Rodger Ward is talked about to this day

One of the Indy 500's most thrilling battles

Last Sunday, some five million people watched the 109th running of the Indianapolis 500. Not many of them were European – the concept of an oval track is just too baffling for most racing fans raised over here – yet we won't take issue with organisers billing 'the big one' as 'the greatest spectacle in racing'.

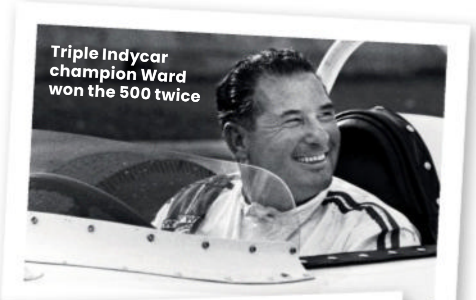
Oval racing necessitates entirely different techniques and tactics to what we Europeans are used to, adding to the intrigue. And thrilling 500s are frequent: last year, there were 48 lead changes in the three hours of racing. Formula 1 grands prix never get nearly that amount of action – and, incredibly, 48 isn't even close to the record for an Indy 500: that stands at 68, set in 2014.

Perhaps the finest two-man battle at The Brickyard, though, was seen back in 1960. At a time when Jack Brabham and Bruce McLaren were fighting for the F1 title in delicate little Coopers and Ferrari's V12-engined 250 Testa Rossa barchetta was dominating sports car racing, American race fans were fixated on Rodger Ward and Jim Rathmann in what were called roadsters. Looking rather like more muscular F1 cars, these were low and wide single-seaters with offset drivelines.

The first such car had been made in 1952, the driveline offset and the engine canted over because it was a giant diesel that else wouldn't fit. The Cummins power experiment failed but the benefits of the much lower profile and a left-side weight bias were obvious, and soon every car in the Indy 500 was a roadster.

These cars had a DIY whiff about them: whereas today Chevrolet and Honda provide engines for major racing firms like Andretti, roadsters were 'specials' built atop chassis from small 'workshop' concerns – primarily Kurtis Kraft and Watson. And remarkably, all of them used the same engine: the four-cylinder, dual-overhead-cam 'Offy', which one Fred Offenhauser had designed three decades prior for marine use.

Autocar reported of the 1960 race:



Triple Indycar champion Ward won the 500 twice

Brickyard triumph was one of Rathmann's three major race wins

"When the day dawned cool, cloudy and humid, some of the sharper team managers began dreaming about maybe only two tyre stops instead of the usual three.

"When the flag dropped, Ward was able to sweep into the lead in the first turn from his place on the outside of the first row. But he didn't push it as expected; his early lap speeds were only around 142mph.

(Notably, the all-time record had been smashed in qualifying, Jim Hurtubise doing 149mph via a novel tactic: "using his brakes really hard". Convention was to use them lightly and only before the two big turns, but he stomped on them into all four, while using a little throttle, taking him 200-300 feet farther into each.)

"Then apparently Troy Ruttman saw that the tyre wear rate would not support any two-stop strategy, so he forged into the lead and stepped the pace up to 143-145mph. He made his first tyre stop on the 25th lap; Ward and Rathmann made it to the 40th.

"From this point on until fairly late in the race, the lead changed hands frequently, due to the numerous pit stops. Having lost time when his engine stalled on the first stop, Ward didn't challenge again until nearly halfway.

"We could see the hair-raising finish shaping up when the front runners – Rathmann, Ward and Johnny Thomson – all stopped for their last set on the 144th lap."

The pace was so hot that it burned out Thomson's magneto, taking him out of contention. Thereafter Ward and Rathmann commenced battle.

"Both reached the 485-mile point with their right-front tyres down to the cord – and running wheel to wheel." Thrillingly, they swapped position 15 times in this final stage.

"Somebody had to back off; an all-out sprint to the finish with tyres in that condition could have clobbered one of them easily." Indeed, orange strips were by then visible, showing that there was only enough rubber remaining for two or three laps.

"Ward apparently decided that discretion was the better part of valour and let off on the 197th lap." Aged 39, perhaps he was wiser to the risk (driver fatalities were common then), but more likely 31-year-old Rathmann was desperate to taste that celebratory milk after Ward had won a similar battle in 1959.

He pulled into victory lane with both of his right-sided tyres practically bald, strips showing.

"This was the most interesting and exciting race we have seen in years at the oval," we concluded.

KRIS CULMER

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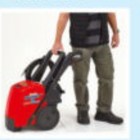

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Matt Saunders, road test editor

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Rather than thinking in entirely relative terms, we rank cars according to more abstract definitions of their performance, functionality and fitness for purpose, so that every particular verdict means something and has a degree of permanence.

We also penalise cars up to a star for what we consider particularly conspicuous and regressive failings concerning active safety systems or missing instrumentation or physical secondary controls.

☆ Hopeless, egregious. In some cases, potentially dangerous.
⯪ Appalling. An emphatic failure.
★ Very poor. Consistently flawed or seriously misconceived.
★⯪ Inadequate. Sub-standard in key areas.
★★ Mediocre. Acceptable at best.
★★⯪ Competent. Mostly average, with very few highlights.
★★★ Respectable. Consistently decent, with some strengths.
★★★⯪ Good. Well rounded and competitive in key areas.
★★★★ Very good. Sets some new class standards and misses few.
★★★★⯪ Excellent. Extends several key class standards.
★★★★★ Exceptional, unsurpassed. All but flawless.

ABARTH

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
500 Esseesse	★★★★☆	25.3.09	Charm on a stick. Raucous and fun.	7.6	6.5	1135	35.8	-
500e Turismo	★★★⯪☆	9.8.23	A stylish and entertaining pint-size EV but pricey and needs refining.	6.9	6.4	1395	-	142
595 Competizione	★★★⯪☆	26.2.14	Great when it's good but tiring when it's bad.	7.5	6.4	1135	39.2	-

ALFA ROMEO

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Giulia Quadrifoglio	★★★★⯪	29.3.17	Everything you would want a fast Alfa Romeo saloon to be. A triumph.	4.5	3.2	1700	35.7	-
Stelvio 2.2D 210 Milano Edizione	★★★⯪☆	3.1.18	Likeable, if short of class's usual refinements.	6.8	7.0	1815	49.7	-
Stelvio Quadrifoglio	★★★⯪☆	9.1.19	A real driver's car, but it stretches SUV-related bounds of acceptability.	4.0	3.3	1931	31.9	-
Stelvio 2.0T 280 Veloce AWD	★★★★☆	28.6.23	Short on premium refinement but meets its discreetly sporty brief well.	5.7	5.3	1784	32.2	-

ALPINE

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
A110 Première Edition	★★★★★	16.5.18	Hilarious fun delivered in effusive and accessible fashion.	4.7	3.8	1125	45.6	-
A110 Légende GT	★★★★⯪	9.3.22	The best fast A110 we've seen but not quite the definitive version.	4.8	3.9	1140	40.2	-
A110 R	★★★⯪☆	15.11.23	Hardcore A110 has its lures but probably not enough of them for its price.	4.2	3.5	1094	39.7	-

ARIEL

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Atom 4	★★★★★	9.10.19	Track-slayer is unrivalled for built-in quality and dynamic character.	3.2	2.4	680	39.2	-

ASTON MARTIN

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Vantage	★★★★⯪	18.9.24	Baby Aston grows up to spectacular effect. A machine of stunning breadth and likeability.	3.5	2.6	1745	28.5	-
DBS Superleggera	★★★★★	21.11.18	Effortlessly fast and intoxicating to drive, the big Aston is better than ever.	3.7	2.7	1910	25.6	-
Vanquish	★★★★⯪	26.3.25	Aston's blown V12 lives on in a devastatingly effective super-GT.	3.1	2.3	1951	25.8	-
DBX 707	★★★★☆	30.11.22	A better DBX to drive, but still leaves room for improvement.	3.3	2.8	2278	26.2	-

AUDI

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
A1 Sportback 35 TFSI S Line Style Edition	★★★⯪☆	2.10.19	Luxury supermini lacks the polish to justify its high price.	7.9	8.4	1209	57.0	-
S3 Sportback	★★★⯪☆	18.11.20	Audi delivers an effective if somewhat unlovable hot hatch.	4.8	4.2	1552	39.0	-
RS4 Avant	★★★★☆	14.2.18	A hot estate that oozes class but is curiously short on charisma.	4.0	3.5	1790	36.7	-
S5 Launch Edition	★★★★☆	15.1.25	Rounded sports saloon with a characterful V6 and new-found dose of driver appeal.	4.1	3.8	2027	33.7	-
A6 50 TFSIe Quattro S Line	★★★★☆	5.1.22	Hybrid tech boosts saloon's refinement, charm and running credentials.	5.7	5.2	2077	45.4	34
S6 E-tron Avant Launch Edition	★★★⯪☆	16.4.25	Strong technical showing is undermined by price and lack of discernible character.	3.7	2.9	2346	2.8	256
RS6 Avant GT	★★★★☆	5.2.25	Retro visual charm meets unprecedented dynamism in big-hearted estate.	3.2	2.7	2144	26.3	-
A7 Sportback 50 TDI Quattro Sport	★★★⯪☆	11.7.18	Easy on the eye and to live with but let down by stolid dynamics.	5.8	5.3	1880	53.1	-
A8 L 60 TFSIe Quattro Sport	★★★⯪☆	17.6.20	Technically impressive but not as cosseting as a limo ought to be.	-	-	2330	-	-
E-tron 55 Quattro	★★★★⯪	26.6.19	A rounded, uber-luxurious addition to the premium EV niche.	5.4	4.2	2569	-	218
E-tron S Quattro	★★★⯪☆	2.6.21	A slick, tech-laden luxury operator but no dynamic landmark for EVs.	4.2	3.6	2643	-	-
Q2 1.4 TFSI Sport	★★★⯪☆	9.11.16	Fit for purpose but a less compelling option than it might have been.	8.1	8.2	1316	-	-
SQ2 Quattro S Tronic	★★★★☆	20.3.19	More fun than you might expect from a crossover or an Audi S model.	4.5	4.1	1530	34.5	-
Q4 E-tron 40 Sport	★★★⯪☆	7.7.21	Practical, pleasant and efficient but not a superior premium product.	8.1	7.8	2112	-	-
Q5 TDI Quattro 204PS S Line	★★★⯪☆	14.5.25	Pleasant and competitive but no particular step forward.	6.7	7.1	2072	42.6	-
Q6 E-tron Quattro Edition 1	★★★⯪☆	2.10.24	EV is hard to love, easier to recommend, with good dynamics and strong EV credentials.	5.3	4.3	–	2.8	247
Q7 3.0 TDI Quattro S Line	★★★★☆	12.8.15	Plush, suave and spacious but so-so to drive.	6.2	6.2	2245	-	-
SQ7 4.0 TDI Quattro	★★★★⯪	26.10.16	A class-topping blend of superlative comfort and usable performance.	5.1	4.5	2330	37.9	-
Q8 50 TDI S Line	★★★★☆	26.9.18	Striking and effective SUV-coupé leaves us wanting more.	6.9	6.7	2285	40.1	-
R8 V10 Plus	★★★★☆	30.12.15	Supercar grips and goes even harder but wants for its predecessor's delicacy.	3.1	2.6	1730	-	-
S E-tron GT	★★★★☆	2.4.25	Audi's super-EV holds great appeal in its purest form but isn't at the bleeding edge.	3.1	2.4	2361	2.8	262

BENTLEY

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Bentayga W12	★★★★⯪	18.5.16	Versatile, genteel, luxurious SUV with a silken sporting edge.	4.9	4.4	2440	-	-
Bentayga EWB Mulliner Blackline	★★★★☆	24.4.24	Stretched SUV lacks the Mulsanne limo's charm but is a better luxury car by far.	4.4	3.8	2600	25.6	-
Continental GT Speed	★★★★☆	22.12.21	Remains a wonderful grand tourer but can fall short as an entertainer.	3.4	2.7	2279	22.0	-
Continental GTC V8 S	★★★★⯪	19.4.23	Sporty V8 execution adds vivacity to a car that makes you feel good.	3.6	3.2	2295	29.1	-
Continental GT Speed Hybrid First Edition	★★★★☆	16.4.25	Electrons make fastest GT quicker but not necessarily better.	3.1	2.5	2462	28.0	47
Flying Spur Hybrid Mulliner	★★★★⯪	17.8.22	Mightily convincing PHEV limo more than earns its Bentley wings.	4.4	3.9	2596	30.1	28

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Flying Spur Speed First Edition	★★★★☆	21.5.25	Hulking V8 hybrid powertrain broadens Spur's remit and skyrockets performance.	3.2	2.7	2750	26.7	44

BMW

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
120 M Sport	★★★⯪☆	31.12.24	Credible and complete junior BMW still lacks distinguishing driver appeal.	7.3	6.8	1489	45.8	-
218i M Sport Gran Coupé	★★★☆☆	8.4.20	Junior Gran Coupé hits some high notes but fails to inspire.	8.8	8.4	1375	58.2	-
220i M Sport Coupé	★★★★☆	1.6.22	A good coupé rather than a great sports car.	7.3	7.3	1546	46.8	-
M2 Coupé Manual	★★★★⯪	12.7.23	Junior M car takes huge objective leaps but smaller subjective ones.	4.5	3.8	1687	32.1	-
320d M Sport Auto	★★★★★	15.5.19	BMW's one-time default-choice executive saloon hits even greater heights.	6.9	6.8	1639	63.3	-
330d xDrive M Sport Plus Edition Touring	★★★★⯪	15.1.20	An estate that's powerful, classy and great to drive – but with a price to match.	5.5	5.2	1922	52.6	-
330e M Sport	★★★★⯪	1.7.20	Slicker and sweeter-handling than the average PHEV. A true 3 Series.	-	-	1740	-	-
M440i xDrive	★★★★☆	6.1.21	A rounded, engaging and potent coupé let down only by its looks.	4.1	3.7	1775	44.0	-
M4 Competition	★★★★⯪	21.4.21	A very modern M car and a brilliantly versatile and enjoyable one.	3.9	2.9	1800	32.7	-
M4 CS	★★★★☆	23.4.25	Stunning performance and pace comes with costs that aren't so easy to justify.	2.9	2.5	1747	32.4	-
i4 M50	★★★★☆	19.1.22	Fast, refined and with lots of traditional appeal to convert sceptics.	4.1	3.2	2248	-	186
M4 CSL	★★★★☆	16.11.22	A next-level M car, with the more complex temperament to match.	3.6	2.7	1625	31.1	-
M5	★★★⯪☆	29.1.25	A technical leap, but one born more out of necessity than inspiration.	3.5	2.8	2373	27.3	35
i5 eDrive40 M Sport Pro	★★★⯪☆	29.11.23	Has dynamic appeal but less convincing than BMW's other EV saloons.	5.4	4.4	2213	-	235
550e xDrive M Sport Pro	★★★★☆	3.4.24	Undeniably capable and a fine plug-in hybrid sports saloon.	4.4	3.5	2232	40.1	47
i7 xDrive60 M Sport	★★★★⯪	15.2.23	It has taken huge strides as a luxury car – and still drives like a BMW.	4.5	3.4	2758	-	264
840d xDrive	★★★★☆	16.1.19	A likeable big GT, albeit not the most luxurious or rewarding on sale.	5.0	4.6	1901	49.2	-
M8 Competition Convertible	★★★⯪☆	5.2.20	Has attitude to spare but isn't the complete super-GT.	3.3	2.7	2020	31.6	-
M8 Competition	★★★⯪☆	3.6.20	Highly capable but doesn't truly satisfy as either a sports car or a GT.	-	-	1960	-	-
X1 xDrive23i M Sport	★★★⯪☆	25.1.23	A decent family crossover but a poor BMW.	6.4	6.0	1800	45.6	-
X4 M Competition	★★★☆☆	13.11.19	Fast and precise, if short on the big-time charisma that you would expect.	4.0	3.3	2028	29.0	-
X5 xDrive30d M Sport	★★★★☆	2.1.19	Better to drive than the SUV norm but not better across the board.	6.6	6.6	2279	43.1	-
X6 M Competition	★★★☆☆	20.3.24	Unyielding performance focus makes for a fast but compromised SUV.	3.5	3.1	2442	29.3	-
X7 M60i xDrive	★★★★☆	29.3.23	Uncompromising-looking X7 is seriously fast but laudably refined.	4.2	3.7	2600	28.9	-
iX xDrive50 M Sport	★★★★⯪	2.3.22	Takes the luxury EV to elevated heights, but its design is easy to criticise.	4.4	3.4	2593	-	252
Z4 M40i with Handschalter Pack	★★★★☆	21.8.24	Manual gearbox gives six-year-old roadster new depth.	5.7	5.9	1561	36.9	-

BMW ALPINA

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
B3 GT Touring	★★★★⯪	15.1.25	Last-dance B3 has mighty breadth and will go down as one of the all-time greats.	3.3	2.7	1910	29.4	-
B8 Gran Coupé	★★★★☆	22.9.21	Superbly rounded but lacking some dynamism implied by its looks.	3.5	2.8	2100	-	-

BYD

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Atto 3 Design	★★★☆☆	31.5.23	Lack of attention to detail detracts from the impressive battery tech.	7.0	6.2	1787	-	201
Seal Design	★★★⯪☆	17.1.24	Frustrating software lets down the mostly impressive hardware.	5.8	4.7	2116	-	279

CATERHAM

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Seven 160	★★★★☆	20.11.13	Fun entry-level version of B-road toy smacks just a little of compromise.	8.4	8.7	510	44.8	-
Seven 620S	★★★★⯪	9.3.16	Supplies fun intravenously with a mix of freneticism and road-going usability.	3.8	4.2	650	29.5	-
Seven 420 Cup	★★★★⯪	31.8.22	Track-day variant serves up sensational driving thrills – for a price.	4.2	3.4	560	35.3	-

CHEVROLET

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Corvette 3LT	★★★★☆	22.6.22	Big step up for charismatic, usable and temptingly priced American icon.	3.9	3.2	1679	32.9	-
Corvette Z06 3LZ	★★★★☆	16.8.23	Incredible engine and chassis makeover, but the price has to be right.	3.1	2.4	1670	26.1	-

CITROEN

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Ami Colour	★★⯪☆☆	11.1.23	Cleverly conceived but hard to recommend, given its limited capabilities.	-	-	471	-	39
ë-C3 Max	★★★⯪☆	30.4.25	Predictable limitations but also plenty of usability, space and cheer for the money.	10.7	10.3	1479	2.8	-
C3 Aircross Puretech 110 Flair	★★★⯪☆	7.3.18	Practical small crossover isn't outstanding to drive but is likeable nonetheless.	11.5	10.7	1159	39.5	-
C4 Puretech 130 Shine Plus Auto	★★★☆☆	26.5.21	Has rational and irrational appeal but lacks a fine-tuned execution.	9.5	9.2	1320	56.4	-
ë-C4 X Shine	★★★⯪☆	3.5.23	EV motoring done differently, with value, but its successes are qualified.	9.7	8.8	1623	-	162
C5 Aircross BlueHDi 180 Flair Plus	★★★⯪☆	13.2.19	Attractive and interesting, although its style is better than its substance.	9.0	8.5	1540	47.8	-
C5 X Puretech 180 Shine Plus	★★★★☆	28.9.22	Good value and comfy, this is the kind of car that Citroën should be making.	7.8	7.1	1502	47.8	-

CUPRA

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Born 204PS 58kWh V3	★★★⯪☆	6.7.22	As good as the family hatchback EV class gets in places but not as good as it could be.	6.7	6.2	1794	-	220
Born VZ First Edition	★★★★☆	9.10.24	An already fine electric car's driver appeal is lifted but not transformed.	5.4	4.2	1996	3.5	269
Leon Estate 310PS VZ3	★★★★☆	8.9.21	Fiercely quick and dependable but pulls the heartstrings only lightly.	4.9	4.3	1707	40.1	-
Leon 2.0 TSI 245PS VZ2	★★★★☆	27.7.22	Brilliantly rounded hot hatch shines in its simplest spec.	5.9	4.7	1468	43.4	-
Ateca 2.0 TSI 4Drive DSG	★★★⯪☆	23.1.19	Hot crossover is objectively impressive but lacks true driver reward.	4.9	4.4	1615	36.7	-
Formentor 2.0 TSI 4Drive VZ2 DSG	★★★★⯪	3.2.21	Versatile, interesting, rewarding. One of the best fast crossovers yet.	5.1	4.3	1583	36.4	-
Tavascan V1	★★★☆☆	5.2.25	Electric SUV is competent but not very compelling or memorable.	6.0	5.0	2129	3.2	246

DACIA

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Sandero Stepway TCe 90 Prestige	★★★★☆	28.4.21	Cut-price crossover is compromised in surprisingly few areas.	11.9	11.9	1096	54.1	-
Duster Hybrid 140 Journey	★★★★⯪	27.11.24	Notably improved yet barely any pricier.	9.7	8.7	1413	40.2	-
Jogger TCe 110 Comfort	★★★★⯪	20.4.22	Superb versatility, outstanding value and so likeable with it.	11.0	11.0	1267	48.5	-

DS

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
3 Crossback Puretech 155 Prestige	★★★☆☆	10.7.19	No design smash hit. Short on perceived quality and dynamic polish.	8.8	8.3	1205	48.6	-
4 E-Tense 225 Performance Line+	★★★⯪☆	29.6.22	High price and a list of niggles keep this family hatchback away from the top.	7.4	6.0	1706	44.7	26
7 Crossback Puretech 225 Prestige	★★★⯪☆	19.9.18	DS's first SUV is a competent but slightly bland addition to the class.	8.6	7.0	1616	44.6	-
7 E-Tense 4x4 360 La Première	★★★⯪☆	26.4.23	More focused and makes subtle gains, but its powertrain and ride frustrate.	5.7	4.6	1956	36.6	29
9 E-Tense 225 Performance Line Plus	★★★⯪☆	2.2.22	Posh saloon is alternative and devoted to its luxury remit but no show-stopper.	8.6	7.1	1886	44.7	20

FERRARI

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
296 GTB	★★★★★	21.12.22	Stellar modern-era Ferrari supercar has an unrivalled breadth of talent.	2.7	1.9	1648	37.8	15
SF90 Stradale	★★★★☆	3.11.21	Sets the performance benchmark but isn't a track-handling great.	2.5	1.8	1698	24.4	16

FIAT

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
500 Twinair Lounge	★★★⯪☆	24.11.10	Characterful and stylish, but its real-world economy lets it down.	11.7	13.0	1070	42.1	-
500C 1.2 Pop	★★★★☆	5.8.09	Landaulet hits the spot every bit as well as the regular hatchback and is often better.	13.2	14.4	1035	48.3	-
500e 42kWh Icon	★★★★☆	26.1.22	More than just an electric city car and a welcome return to form.	8.1	7.7	1365	-	142
600e La Prima	★★★⯪☆	27.3.24	Electric crossover is decent value and easy to drive but otherwise a bit easy to overlook.	8.8	7.7	1587	-	173

FORD

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Fiesta ST	★★★★⯪	15.8.18	Great to drive and supreme value but not better than before in all aspects.	6.6	7.8	1218	48.2	-

0–60mph 30–70mph Kerb weight Touring economy Electric range

Focus 1.5 Ecoboost 182PS ST-Line X ★★★★½ 20.2.19
Better to drive and look at than before and impressively good value.
8.9 7.8 1417 43.8 -

Focus ST ★★★★☆ 11.9.19
Big on character and performance but not quite truly immersive.
6.1 4.9 1433 40.7 -

Puma 1.0T 125PS MHEV Titanium ★★★★½ 25.3.20
The driver's car the compact crossover class has been crying out for and more besides.
10.0 9.6 1260 50.0 -

Puma ST ★★★★☆ 24.3.21
Well judged, versatile and fun. The jacked-up hot hatch done well.
7.2 6.2 1301 41.5 -

Explorer Extended Range Premium RWD ★★★½☆ 23.10.24
Electric family crossover is better to drive than rivals, but at a cost.
5.8 4.8 2067 2.9 262

Kuga 2.5 PHEV ST-Line ★★★½☆ 24.6.20
Good value and potentially frugal, but this SUV has more to give.
- - 1844 - -

Mustang Mach-E Extended Range RWD ★★★★☆ 23.6.21
Worthy of the name? Perhaps not, but it's still impressive and likeable.
6.8 5.6 2130 - -

Mustang Mach-E GT AWD ★★★☆☆ 27.4.22
Has its moments but lacks the dynamism of a typical fast Ford.
4.2 3.5 2298 - -

Mustang Dark Horse ★★★½☆ 20.11.24
Brimming with character but more compromised than many of its forebears.
4.5 3.5 1853 26.1 -

Tourneo Courier 1.0 Ecoboost Titanium ★★★½☆ 10.7.24
Has some Ford-typical star quality but not enough for the money.
10.8 10.6 1426 47.4 -

Transit Custom L2H1 320 2.0 EcoBlue 150PS Limited ★★★★☆ 8.5.24
Likely to remain the default commercial vehicle, despite a high price.
12.1 11.8 1971 38.8 -

Ranger 2.0TD EcoBlue 205PS Wildtrak ★★★★½ 14.6.23
Pick-up truck is practical, car-like to drive and generally hard to fault.
9.8 9.9 2348 36.6 -

F-150 Lightning Platinum ★★★½☆ 17.5.23
Electric truck has huge utility and appealing range, but its size and price will put many off.
4.5 3.7 3121 - 288

GENESIS

G70 2.2 CRDi Luxury Line ★★★½☆ 10.11.21
Likeable left-field choice struggles to threaten the establishment.
7.2 6.7 1751 60.4 -

Electrified G80 ★★★½☆ 12.10.22
Electric limo doesn't quite hit the mark like its Kia and Hyundai platform-mates.
4.4 4.0 2349 - 272

0–60mph 30–70mph Kerb weight Touring economy Electric range

GV60 Sport Plus ★★★★☆ 24.8.22
Handsome, fast, sophisticated electric crossover is the best Genesis yet.
3.8 3.1 2192 - 220

GV80 3.0D Luxury 5-Seater ★★★½☆ 15.9.21
Rich, spacious and comfortable but not a world-class luxury SUV yet.
6.7 6.6 2217 45.0 -

GWM ORA

Funky Cat 48kWh First Edition ★★½☆☆ 1.2.23
Electric hatch is decent value and has funky looks but is a mediocre experience overall.
7.7 7.2 1580 - 154

HONDA

E Advance ★★★½☆ 26.8.20
More than just a pretty face in the EV crowd but its limited range is an issue.
7.9 - 1535 - 110

Jazz 1.5 i-MMD Hybrid EX ★★★½☆ 7.10.20
Eminently practical, impressively frugal and pretty joyless to drive.
9.6 10.0 1248 57.0 -

Civic Type R GT ★★★★½ 25.10.17
Hot hatch is a sheer delight for enthusiast drivers and their bank balances.
5.7 7.1 1400 57.0 -

HR-V e:HEV Advance Style ★★★½☆ 24.11.21
Fine ergonomics and big on superficial charm but leaves us cold.
9.2 9.3 1397 43.2 -

e:Ny1 Advance ★★★☆☆ 1.11.23
EV is charming in some ways but has too little substance to justify the price.
8.6 6.9 1756 - 211

HYUNDAI

i10 1.2 MPi Premium ★★★★☆ 15.4.20
Smallest Hyundai regains leadership of the city car class.
12.3 12.9 999 52.5 -

i20 1.0 T-GDi 100 48V SE Connect ★★★½☆ 24.2.21
Steady gains for a versatile runabout still lacking some personality.
9.7 10.1 1065 63.5 -

i20 N ★★★★½ 25.8.21
N division's finest car to date. A serious hot hatch with real dynamic polish.
6.1 5.4 1231 50.6 -

i30 Tourer 1.4 T-GDi Premium SE ★★★½☆ 13.9.17
Competent, servile, inoffensive-looking family estate offers little to like or dislike.
9.5 9.7 1425 48.9 -

i30 N Performance ★★★½☆ 28.12.17
Hyundai's first hot hatch attempt is fast and full-blooded with rough edges.
6.4 5.6 1478 43.1 -

Ioniq 6 RWD Ultimate ★★★½☆ 7.6.23
Usable, rangy and innovative EV let down by cabin packaging and ride.
7.2 6.2 2006 - 272

Kona 1.0 120PS Advance ★★★★☆ 6.9.23
Hyundai brings some cheer, value and space to the compact crossover class.
10.4 10.3 1352 50.4 -

0–60mph 30–70mph Kerb weight Touring economy Electric range

Tucson 1.6 T-GDi Hybrid Premium ★★★★☆ 17.3.21
Tucson shows that Hyundai can do both style and substance.
7.6 6.2 1612 47.7 -

Ioniq 5 N ★★★★★ 7.8.24
A little big and heavy, but compelling like no other EV to date.
3.5 2.7 2221 - 224

Santa Fe Hybrid 4WD Premium ★★★★☆ 16.10.24
A superb lounge on wheels, but let down by its powertrain.
7.9 7.5 2007 32.9 -

Nexo ★★★½☆ 12.6.19
Impressive effort that heads in the right direction for hydrogen fuel cell cars.
9.6 9.7 1852 - -

INEOS

Grenadier 3.0 T Fieldmaster ★★★½☆ 20.9.23
Unquestionably a serious proposition but maybe lacking in innovation.
8.0 8.1 2682 20.9 -

JAECOO

7 SHS 2WD Luxury ★★½☆☆ 9.4.25
Chinese PHEV SUV is efficient and keenly priced but has too many usability flaws.
7.3 6.4 1814 35.0 41

JAGUAR

XE 2.0 200PS R-Sport ★★★★½ 1.7.15
Junior saloon hits the spot, matching the best of its German rivals at their own game.
7.6 6.7 1530 48.7 -

XF Sportbrake 300PS R-Sport AWD ★★★½☆ 17.4.19
Estate is built on enthusiast values but in need of a wider update.
6.6 6.2 1727 36.8 -

E-Pace D180 AWD SE ★★★½☆ 11.4.18
Misses the mark for keen drivers but is a desirable SUV nevertheless.
9.9 10.5 1768 49.2 -

I-Pace EV400 S ★★★★½ 12.9.18
Jaguar's landmark car strikes a heavy blow to Tesla's luxury EV monopoly.
4.5 3.5 2236 - -

F-Pace SVR ★★★★½ 24.7.19
Broad-batted and can vividly thrill but hasn't forgotten its SUV roots.
4.1 3.5 2070 29.4 -

F-Pace 400e R-Dynamic HSE ★★★★½ 1.12.21
Facelift hits the mark. Electrification is a mixed but creditable success.
5.1 4.6 2264 - 24

F-Type P575 R AWD Coupé ★★★★☆ 29.4.20
The same likeable bruiser behind those prettier features.
- - 1743 - -

JEEP

Avenger Electric Summit ★★★½☆ 24.1.24
Not perfect but successfully takes Jeep in a fresh direction.
8.3 6.9 1601 - 172

Compass 2.0 Multijet II 140 4WD Limited ★★★½☆ 3.10.18
Pricey, pokey, gruff Jeep is a long shot for SUV market success.
11.0 11.5 1540 44.8 -

0–60mph 30–70mph Kerb weight Touring economy Electric range

Compass 4xe S ★★★☆☆ 16.2.22
Not without niche appeal but off the pace in too many respects.
6.4 5.7 1872 46.9 22

Renegade 2.0 Multijet II 140 4WD Limited ★★★½☆ 28.10.15
Charmingly authentic but also pricey and rather rough and ready.
10.8 11.2 1502 52.6 -

Renegade 4xe Trailhawk ★★★☆☆ 30.6.21
Electrified Jeep has some charm but is typically rough and ready.
6.7 5.6 1816 39.4 21

Wrangler 2.2 Multijet II Overland ★★★★☆ 10.4.19
Off-road icon is now more competent on it.
9.0 9.1 2122 37.6 -

KGM

Tivoli XLV ELX Auto ★★★☆☆ 14.9.16
Practical, well-priced crossover is competent but far from compelling.
12.0 12.6 1469 - -

KIA

Picanto 1.0 MPI 2 ★★★½☆ 11.9.24
No great advance for the breed but likeable, capable and still here.
13.4 13.9 985 51.4 -

Ceed 1.6 CRDi 115bhp 2 ★★★★☆ 29.8.18
Big step up in the family hatchback class is a watershed moment for Kia.
9.9 9.6 1411 70.3 -

Proceed 1.4 T-GDi GT-Line S ★★★½☆ 27.2.19
Alluring and interesting but not quite as special to drive as it looks.
9.5 8.9 1475 42.6 -

TOP 3

BEST AFFORDABLE SPORTS CARS

1 Alpine A110

2 Porsche 718 Cayman

3 Ariel Atom

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Road tests revisited

2009 JAGUAR XFR

Two years after Jaguar creates an excellent rival to the BMW 5 Series, it stuffs a thwacking great V8 under the bonnet. "Has sufficient raw dynamic ability to drop a BMW M5 in a heartbeat. Jaguar has produced a world-beater."

Price £65,044
Engine V8, 5000cc, supercharged, petrol
Power 503bhp at 6000-6500rpm
Torque 461lb ft at 2500-5500rpm
Weight 1990kg
0-60mph 4.7sec
0-100mph 10.2sec
Top speed 155mph
Economy 19.8mpg

1973 PORSCHE 911 CARRERA RS TOURING

First-ever RS is a homologation special for Group 4 motorsport. "Superb performance, brakes, roadholding, traction and steering. A classic whose speed makes its price more justifiable than is usual. Sensational, even by Porsche standards."

Price £7233
Engine 6 cyls horizontally opposed, 2687cc, petrol
Power 210bhp at 6300rpm
Torque 188lb ft at 5100rpm
Weight 1216kg
0-60mph 5.5sec
0-100mph 15.0sec
Top speed 149mph
Economy 16.7mpg

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*For three weeks from publication date

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Xceed 1.4 T-GDi First Edition	★★★½☆	20.11.19	Looks good and drives well but lacks some practicality and polish.	9.3	8.7	1452	46.8	-
Soul EV Urban	★★★½☆	5.7.23	Not actually that cheap but likeable and complete.	8.0	8.3	1569	-	147
Niro EV 3	★★★★☆	7.9.22	A good family EV made better, despite some missed opportunities.	6.9	5.6	1739	-	246
EV3 81.4kWh GT-Line	★★★★☆	31.12.24	New-era Niro is rationally compelling but not a game-changer.	7.2	6.4	1858	2.6	265
Sportage 1.6 HEV 2WD GT-Line S	★★★½☆	15.6.22	Bold family SUV catches the eye but won't hold your interest to drive.	7.3	6.4	1658	44.8	-
EV6 77.4kWh RWD GT-Line S	★★★★☆	9.10.24	Not the outstanding EV it once was but still a likeably bold choice.	7.5	6.3	–	2.9	227
EV6 GT	★★★½☆	4.10.23	Lots of pace and usability for the money but not enough driver appeal.	3.6	2.7	2161	-	209
Sorento 1.6 HEV T-GDi AWD 2	★★★½☆	20.1.21	Lacks polish, but its abundant utility appeal and value shine through.	8.5	7.9	2006	43.3	-
EV9 GT-Line S	★★★★☆	31.1.24	Style, space, versatility and range for a more reasonable price than rivals.	5.1	4.6	2660	-	220

LAMBORGHINI

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Huracán Performante	★★★★½	11.10.17	Breathtaking track makeover brings it close to greatness.	2.9	2.0	1590	22.4	-
Huracán Evo RWD	★★★★½	20.5.20	Finest driver's car Lamborghini makes is also the most attainable.	-	-	1389	-	-
Revuelto	★★★★½	4.12.24	New-era V12 Lamborghini is an extraordinary statement of intent.	2.5	1.7	1960	24.1	6
Urus	★★★★☆	3.7.19	Italy's latest 'mostro' has a driving experience to blow your mind.	3.3	2.8	2285	28.5	-

LAND ROVER

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Range Rover Evoque P300e R-Dynamic HSE	★★★★½	10.2.21	A better plug-in compact SUV. Expensive but slick and luxurious.	6.8	5.9	2158	32.7	24
Discovery Sport D180 AWD SE	★★★★☆	8.1.20	Off-road fidelity and character outweigh a lacklustre powertrain.	10.3	10.5	2145	47.5	-
Discovery TD6 HSE Luxury	★★★★½	12.4.17	A proper Land Rover, modernised, refined and as likeable as ever.	8.7	8.8	2230	-	-
Range Rover Velar D240 HSE	★★★½☆	30.8.17	Stylish, advanced and accomplished but in need of a better powertrain.	9.3	9.0	2089	48.2	-
Defender 110 P400 X	★★★★½	13.5.20	World-class capability. Brilliant on and off road – at a price.	-	-	2388	-	-
Defender 110 P635 Octa Edition 1	★★★★½	30.4.25	Outrageous, unnecessary and totally awe-inspiring.	4.6	3.7	2717	22.1	-
Range Rover Sport D300 Dynamic SE	★★★★½	2.11.22	Deeply appealing and deeply accomplished, with a price to match.	7.2	6.6	2511	42.5	-
Range Rover Sport SV Edition One	★★★½☆	28.8.24	More capable than most rivals, but others are more compelling.	3.9	5.1	2546	28.9	-
Range Rover D350 HSE	★★★★½	13.7.22	A fantastically well-isolated luxury car and fully paid-up capable 4x4.	6.3	6.0	2667	35.9	-
Range Rover P550e Autobiography	★★★★☆	9.4.25	A unique and enthralling character that brings added refinement in PHEV form.	4.9	4.0	2979	26.6	44

LEXUS

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
LBX FWD Premium Plus Design	★★★½☆	29.5.24	Crossover convinces as a small premium car, but only just.	8.4	8.4	1306	45.2	-
NX 350h AWD Premium Plus Pack	★★★★☆	16.3.22	Interesting, refined and efficient, but not as polished as the best.	7.1	6.7	1812	44.7	-
RX 500h F Sport	★★★½☆	22.3.23	Classy and luxurious, but that might not be enough for keener drivers.	6.1	5.5	2088	31.7	-
ES 300h Takumi	★★★½☆	6.2.19	Boldly styled, economical saloon has a singularly rational but dry character.	8.7	7.6	1742	48.8	-
RC F Ultimate Edition	★★★½☆	6.11.24	Bellows in some ways, whispers in others. A little flawed but never dull or boring.	4.7	3.8	1733	30.1	-
LM 350h AWD Takumi	★★★☆☆	7.2.24	MPV is a fascinating luxury-market curio but no threat to the old-school limo.	8.6	8.2	2368	40.5	-

LOTUS

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Emira V6 First Edition	★★★★½	2.4.25	The British sports car is alive, well and expensive.	4.4	4.0	1493	29.0	–
Emeya 600 GT	★★★★☆	28.5.25	A good electric saloon and a good Lotus.	4.1	2.8	2478	2.4	218
Eletre R	★★★½☆	24.7.24	There's plenty to like about the new Lotus but little sign of the old Lotus.	3.1	2.2	2682	-	216

MASERATI

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Ghibli Diesel	★★★½☆	12.3.14	Saloon isn't lacking in style but is a little short on substance.	6.5	6.0	2040	40.4	-
Grecale Trofeo	★★★½☆	18.10.23	A belting engine but high-priced and not the best-driving Grecale.	3.6	3.2	2097	33.6	-
Levante Diesel	★★★☆☆	30.11.16	A mildly interesting also-ran, with a weak engine and so-so handling.	6.8	6.9	2205	41.5	-
Levante S Granlusso	★★★½☆	8.5.19	Better engine improves the class's curate's egg but can't redeem it.	5.1	4.5	2232	23.7	-
Granturismo Trofeo	★★★½☆	11.9.24	An appealing grand tourer that lacks some sophistication for the price.	3.6	3.1	-	33.0	-
Granturismo Folgore	★★★½☆	26.2.25	Assured and likeable but could only ever be bought with the heart – even sans V8.	2.9	2.3	2358	2.3	183
MC20 Cielo	★★★★☆	16.10.24	Dynamic iconoclast, old-school charmer, occasional GT. A unique supercar.	4.0	2.8	1783	29.6	-

MAZDA

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
2 1.5 Skyactiv-G 90PS SE-L Nav	★★★★☆	22.4.15	The go-to option for keen drivers is also a convincing all-rounder.	10.4	11.0	1050	-	-
3 2.0 Skyactiv-X 181PS GT Sport	★★★★☆	6.11.19	Sweet to drive and great to behold, but the Skyactiv-X engine is no knockout.	9.1	9.1	1425	57.0	-
MX-30 145PS GT Sport Tech	★★★½☆	10.3.21	Has smart looks and a plush interior, but the first Mazda EV deserved more.	9.1	8.6	1663	-	-
CX-30 2.5 e-Skyactiv G Exclusive-Line	★★★★☆	19.2.25	Alternative powertrain is a credit to this voluble, unconventional compact SUV.	7.6	7.6	1422	45.2	-
CX-5 2.2D 150PS 2WD Sport Nav	★★★★☆	28.6.17	Still moderately left of field but now likeable in greater proportions.	9.4	9.2	1620	53.9	-
CX-60 e-Skyactiv D 3.3 RWD Exclusive-Line	★★★½☆	10.5.23	Old-school in all the best ways, but the ride is difficult to overlook.	7.6	7.2	1893	52.3	-
MX-5 1.5 SE-L Nav	★★★★½	2.9.15	An outstanding and usable sports car at an outstanding price.	8.4	7.9	1050	-	-

McLAREN

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
720S	★★★★★	24.5.17	Sufficiently complete and exciting to dominate rivals and hugely fast.	2.9	2.0	1419	24.2	-
750S	★★★★☆	19.6.24	McLaren's mainstay is a bit of a wild child – at times, to its own cost.	2.9	2.0	1412	28.8	-

0-60mph 30-70mph Kerb weight Touring economy Electric range

Artura ★★★★⯪ 19.10.22
Brilliantly packaged, invitingly poised and wise use of electrification.
3.2 2.1 1552 32.9 17

Artura Spider ★★★★⯪ 6.11.24
Artura finds extra form in convertible guise.
3.1 2.2 1618 27.2 17

GT ★★★⯪☆ 27.1.21
Plenty of pace and purity, less GT-typical usability and refinement.
3.3 2.3 1580 34.2

MERCEDES-AMG

A45 S 4Matic+ Plus ★★★★⯪ 4.3.20
AMG brings its hottest hatch yet to life without harming usability.
4.1 3.3 1661 41.5 -

C63 S E Performance 4Matic+ Night Edition Premium Plus Estate
★★★☆☆ 31.7.24
Fascinating engineering feat falls flat as an exciting super-estate.
3.3 2.8 2217 27.1 7.1

GT 63 4Matic+ 4-Door Coupé
★★★★⯪ 13.3.19
AMG defies physics with a four-door GT that handles beautifully.
3.3 2.7 2135 30.1 -

GT 63 S E Performance 4-Door Coupé
★★★⯪☆ 21.6.23
Rocket-ship GT with astonishing powertrain but still lacks driver reward.
2.9 2.5 2339 23.9 6

EQS 53 4Matic+ Night Edition
★★★★☆ 8.6.22
Good but doesn't quite live up to its spectacular on-paper potential.
3.6 2.8 2673 - 259

S63 E Performance Night Edition
★★★★☆ 2.10.24
Prodigiously quick, confoundingly slick in its handling, but has a coarseness to it.
3.5 2.7 2666 26.1 -

GLE 53 4Matic+ Premium Plus
★★★⯪☆ 14.10.20
Remarkable dynamic versatility but lacks some driver appeal.
5.4 4.9 2471 29.4 -

SL 63 4Matic+ Premium Plus
★★★⯪☆ 26.7.23
Stonking V8 doesn't quite redeem a car of as many sacrifices as gains.
3.5 2.8 1939 26.2 -

GT 63 4Matic+ Premium Plus Coupé
★★★⯪☆ 14.8.24
Fearsomely quick and truly usable but less lovable than before.
3.1 2.7 1972 30.7 -

MERCEDES-BENZ

A200 AMG Line Executive
★★★★☆ 24.5.23
Significant progress for a keen-handling and efficient premium hatch.
7.8 7.3 1396 59.3 -

A250e AMG Line Premium
★★★☆☆ 5.8.20
Falls some way short of a rounded 'premium' driving experience.
6.7 5.4 1665 57.8 -

B180 Sport ★★★★☆ 3.4.19
In an ever-shrinking niche, this compact MPV deserves consideration.
8.4 8.3 1405 51.3 -

0-60mph 30-70mph Kerb weight Touring economy Electric range

CLA 250 AMG Line Premium Plus
★★★☆☆ 21.8.19
Nearer the mark to look at but still way wide of it as a driver's car.
6.8 6.1 1555 48.3 -

C300e AMG Line ★★★★⯪ 4.5.22
Long-range hybrid tech gives C-Class an outstanding selling point.
5.8 5.1 2005 49.0 48

E220d AMG Line Premium Plus
★★★★☆ 3.1.24
An effective blend of convention, comfort, luxury and modernity.
7.2 5.9 1917 65.8 -

E450d Estate Exclusive Premium Plus
★★★★⯪ 19.3.25
Big-hearted diesel has speed, space and opulence. The only car you would ever need.
4.9 4.3 2167 46.1 -

EQE 350+ AMG Line Premium Plus
★★★⯪☆ 4.1.23
Hot on comfort and tech but lacklustre on range, material quality and space.
6.0 5.5 2386 - 262

EQS 450+ Business Class
★★★★☆ 7.5.25
Progress has been made, but this limousine still isn't quite the ultimate luxury EV.
5.9 4.9 2608 2.6 248

EQS 450 Business Class SUV
★★★⯪☆ 6.3.24
Ultra-luxurious seven-seater strays confusingly into MPV territory.
5.5 5.2 2899 - 265

S580e L AMG Line Premium Plus Executive ★★★★⯪ 6.4.22
Plug-in S-Class is the best of an otherwise ordinary generation.
5.2 4.2 2530 37.0 45

EQA 250 AMG Line Premium Plus
★★★☆☆ 17.11.21
Competent but entirely average. For the money, we expect better.
8.4 7.6 2030 - 200

GLB 220d 4Matic AMG Line Premium
★★★⯪☆ 16.9.20
Smart looking and practical but its identity feels stretched at times.
7.4 7.1 1810 55.4 -

EQB 300 4Matic AMG Line Premium
★★★⯪☆ 18.5.22
A versatile premium EV that doesn't easily command its premium.
7.7 6.8 2235 - -

GLC 300 4Matic AMG Line Premium Plus ★★★⯪☆ 13.9.23
Shines in places but doesn't notably elevate the GLC proposition.
6.5 6.0 1929 41.2 -

GLS 400d 4Matic AMG Line Premium
★★★⯪☆ 12.2.20
Has much to commend it but not enough to be the S-Class of SUVs.
6.5 6.0 2634 38.2 -

G350d AMG Line ★★★★☆ 17.7.19
Customary capability, charm and ego, now with 21st-century luxury.
7.5 7.2 2451 31.3 -

G500 AMG Line Premium Plus
★★★★☆ 25.9.24
Anachronistic, iconoclastic and expensive but very hard not to love.
5.1 4.5 - 30.7 -

0-60mph 30-70mph Kerb weight Touring economy Electric range

CLE 300e AMG Line Premium Plus Coupé ★★★★☆ 13.11.24
Electrification brings traditional Merc strengths to a desirable mid-sized coupé.
6.1 5.5 2122 37.1 49

MG

3 Hybrid+ Trophy ★★★⯪☆ 12.6.24
Good value and with no serious vices but still lacks a final layer of polish.
6.8 6.2 1311 47.9 -

4 EV Long Range SE ★★★★☆ 5.4.23
Good value, useful and fun to drive to boot.
7.1 6.1 1692 - 185

5 SW EV Exclusive ★★★⯪☆ 25.11.20
MG's second EV does cheap motoring much better than the first.
8.0 7.1 1538 - 161

ZS Hybrid+ Trophy ★★★☆☆ 22.1.25
Roomier, cleverer and better-equipped than you would expect for the money.
7.6 6.6 1422 41.5 -

MINI

John Cooper Works
★★★★☆ 14.5.25
A proper hot hatch let down by a stiff ride and an impenetrable user interface.
5.8 4.5 1363 42.0 -

Countryman C Exclusive
★★★⯪☆ 17.4.24
Spacious but sends mixed messages on family-friendly refinement.
8.7 7.7 1618 46.9 -

Aceman SE Exclusive
★★★⯪☆ 8.1.25
Compact SUV has the usual Mini charm but limited extra grown-up appeal.
6.8 5.7 1756 3.1 162

MORGAN

Plus Four ★★★⯪☆ 12.8.20
Refreshing and fun in that true Morgan way but lacks a little polish.
5.1 4.3 1013 54.0 -

Plus Six ★★★★☆ 10.4.24
The individualist's sports car made better.
4.4 3.3 1188 37.2 -

Super 3 ★★★★⯪ 9.11.22
Adds some subtle modernity to the 3 Wheeler's endless giggles.
6.9 5.9 644 43.5 -

NISSAN

Juke 1.0 DIG-T 117 Tekna ★★★⯪☆ 29.1.20
Impressive in some respects but outstanding in few.
11.9 11.8 1256 46.0 -

Qashqai 1.3 DIG-T 158 Tekna
★★★★☆ 28.7.21
Ticks the important family car boxes but its powertrain frustrates.
10.0 9.3 1412 44.9 -

Ariya 87kWh Evolve ★★★⯪☆ 26.10.22
Surprisingly traditional and luxurious but not wholly successful.
8.2 6.4 2109 - -

X-Trail e-Power e-4orce AWD Tekna
★★★★☆ 22.2.23
Capable all-rounder that deals effortlessly with everyday life.
6.6 6.0 1947 33.8 -

0-60mph 30-70mph Kerb weight Touring economy Electric range

OMODA

5 1.6 TGDI Comfort
★★⯪☆☆ 20.11.24
Chinese SUV has some promise as a purely rational buy but feels under-developed.
7.4 6.3 1474 38.2 -

PEUGEOT

e-208 Allure Premium
★★★★☆ 6.5.20
Stylish, drivable, usable, reasonably priced – and the best small EV
- - 1455 38.2 -

308 1.2T Puretech 130 GT ★★★★☆ 25.5.22
A reminder of the old Peugeot magic. Small, supple and a bit special.
9.5 9.2 1358 55.3 -

408 Hybrid 180 GT e-EAT8 ★★★★☆ 11.10.23
Novel Peugeot shows an alternative path for the family car.
8.2 7.3 1746 42.1 40

508 BlueHDi 180 S&S GT Auto
★★★★☆ 24.10.18
Stylish and likeable but lacking the polish of more premium rivals.
8.8 8.5 1671 52.0 -

508 SW Hybrid 225 S&S Allure e-EAT8
★★★★☆ 8.7.20
This is a comfortable car that looks smart and feels classy.
- - 1720 - -

508 SW Hybrid4 PSE ★★★★☆ 5.5.21
Hits notable handling highs but feels less than sharp elsewhere.
5.7 4.7 1892 44.0 -

TOP 3

BEST HYBRID CARS

1 Toyota Corolla

2 Volkswagen Golf eHybrid

3 Volvo V60 T6

SCAN THE CODE TO SEE THE TOP 10

0-60mph 30-70mph Kerb weight Touring economy Electric range

e-2008 GT Line ★★★⯪☆ **30.9.20**
Cheaper versions impress; pricier ones won't worry class leaders.
9.5 8.9 1638 - -

3008 1.6 BlueHDi 120 GT Line
★★★⯪☆ **18.1.17**
In challenging company, the 3008 promises more than it delivers.
12.0 12.1 1300 53.2 -

e-3008 73kWh Allure ★★★⯪☆ **4.8.24**
Electric family SUV is rich, handsome and refined but no technical tour de force.
8.5 7.1 2132 - 219

5008 Hybrid 136 GT ★★★☆☆ **12.2.25**
Concept car style can't save the function-follows-form engineering.
9.9 9.4 1736 44.0 –

POLESTAR

2 BST Edition 270 ★★★⯪☆ **12.4.23**
A creditable attempt at electric car thrills, although not quite fully formed.
4.5 3.4 2161 - 188

3 Long Range Dual Motor Launch Edition ★★★★☆ **12.2.25**
Electric SUV is spacious, attractive and enticing to drive - with a few lapses.
4.6 3.8 2610 2.3 235

PORSCHE

718 Boxster ★★★★⯪ **8.6.16**
Better than ever objectively, but at the expense of vital subjective appeal.
5.4 4.3 1395 35.9 -

718 Cayman S ★★★★⯪ **10.8.16**
Still the greatest sports coupé out there, even if it doesn't sound like it.
4.8 3.9 1430 - -

TOP 3

BEST ELECTRIC CARS

1 Cupra Born

2 Renault 5

3 Hyundai Ioniq 5 N

SCAN THE CODE TO SEE THE TOP 10

718 Spyder ★★★★⯪ **1.4.20**
Spyder's flat six rectifies most, if not quite all, of the 718's shortcomings.
4.3 3.5 1350 30.1 -

718 Cayman GT4 RS ★★★★★ **14.9.22**
A feast of noise, revs, handling poise and thrills. Incredibly special.
3.9 3.0 1444 27.1 -

911 GT3 PDK ★★★★⯪ **11.8.21**
Less versatile than some past GT3s but still spectacularly good.
3.4 2.7 1430 29.2 -

911 Turbo S ★★★★⯪ **10.8.22**
Has a questionable raison d'être but is engaging and awesomely capable.
2.5 2.0 1640 36.3 -

911 Carrera T ★★★★☆ **30.8.23**
Sharper 911 has a likeable simplicity but makes key compromises.
4.9 3.8 1456 39.1 -

911 GT3 RS ★★★★⯪ **22.11.23**
Esoteric even by hardcore 911 standards but simply monumental.
3.2 2.5 1476 26.7 -

911 Dakar ★★★★☆ **10.1.24**
Rally-raid-themed throwback charms like no other modern 911.
3.3 2.6 1660 36.0 -

911 S/T ★★★★★ **3.7.24**
Porsche's GT division alters its recipe to deliver an all-time great.
3.7 2.6 1408 30.9 -

911 Carrera GTS ★★★★⯪ **5.3.25**
Hybrid tech punts barnstorming Carrera into the supercar sphere.
2.8 2.6 1607 34.3 -

Macan Turbo ★★★★⯪ **4.6.14**
Luxury SUV meets sports car in a compact, well-priced package.
4.7 4.3 2050 30.9 -

Macan Turbo Electric ★★★⯪☆ **19.2.25**
Otherwise appealing EV is undone by chassis tech.
3.0 2.5 – 2.1 219

Cayenne S ★★★★⯪ **21.2.24**
Rebooted Cayenne impresses and the charming V8 is our pick.
5.0 4.3 2256 28.8 -

Cayenne Turbo ★★★★☆ **5.9.18**
As impressive as ever but not quite the driver's car it once was.
3.9 3.4 2307 31.5 -

Cayenne Turbo S E-Hybrid
★★★⯪☆ **27.5.20**
Technically impressive but fails to make a convincing case for itself.
- - 2490 - -

Cayenne Turbo GT Coupé
★★★★☆ **20.7.22**
Uncompromising rapid SUV is a bit of a monster – but a likeable one.
3.1 2.7 2251 26.1 -

Panamera 4 E-Hybrid ★★★★☆ **22.1.25**
Understated plug-in hybrid is a Swiss Army knife super-saloon.
3.8 2.4 2370 30.1 29

Taycan Turbo S ★★★★⯪ **30.10.24**
Porsche deftly keeps its superb EV on the boil.
2.6 1.9 2356 2.7 233

RENAULT

Clio TCe 100 Iconic ★★★★⯪ **27.11.19**
Plusher, smoother, more mature. A car of substance as well as style.
11.6 10.9 1138 56.9 -

5 E-Tech Comfort Range Iconic Five ★★★★⯪ **12.3.25**
Accomplished and well priced, the 5 changes the affordable EV game.
7.7 7.2 1461 3.1 166

Megane E-Tech Techno ★★★⯪☆ **23.11.22**
Likeable and eye-catching, but rivals have moved the EV game on.
6.9 5.4 1688 - 198

Captur TCe 130 S-Edition EDC
★★★⯪☆ **18.3.20**
Second-generation Captur should prove popular, but not with this powertrain.
9.4 9.2 1363 53.1 -

Arkana E-Tech Hybrid 145 S-Edition
★★★⯪☆ **13.10.21**
Eminently sensible but unspectacular.
11.0 10.1 1365 58.3 -

Scenic E-Tech Iconic Long Range
★★★★☆ **26.6.24**
The Scenic finally conforms but does so with style and substance.
8.1 6.3 1916 - 313

Austral E-Tech Iconic Esprit Alpine
★★★⯪☆ **19.7.23**
Clever hybrid and pleasant cabin but let down by clumsy dynamics.
8.5 6.9 1696 43.5 -

ROLLS-ROYCE

Ghost ★★★★⯪ **13.1.21**
Most technologically advanced Rolls-Royce is an exceptional limo.
4.7 3.8 2490 28.5 -

Phantom ★★★★★ **4.4.18**
The world's greatest and finest luxury car is now also the very best.
5.5 4.4 2780 28.4 -

Spectre ★★★★⯪ **20.12.23**
Superbly lavish and intoxicatingly refined, if shy of epoch-making.
4.1 3.1 2935 - 245

Cullinan Black Badge ★★★★☆ **19.2.20**
Far more likeable to drive than look at, for those who have a use for it.
4.9 4.2 2739 23.6 -

SEAT

Ibiza 1.0 TSI SE Technology
★★★★⯪ **19.7.17**
Grown-up supermini shows its rivals how it's done – in most respects.
10.0 10.0 1047 55.6 -

Leon eHybrid FR ★★★⯪☆ **2.12.20**
Competent and efficient but verges on being forgettable to drive.
7.2 6.2 1558 46.3 26

Arona 1.0 TSI SE Technology
★★★★☆ **15.11.17**
Polished, mature all-rounder has since lost its class-best crown.
10.5 10.7 1149 40.9 -

Ateca 1.5 Eco TSI FR Black Edition DSG
★★★☆☆ **25.10.23**
Once-appealing Nissan Qashqai rival now shows some signs of neglect.
8.9 8.0 1396 44.4 -

SKODA

Fabia 1.0 TSI 95PS SE Comfort
★★★★⯪ **9.2.22**
Comfy, spacious and good value, this supermini is Skoda at its best.
9.9 9.7 1117 58.7 -

Scala SE 1.5 TSI 150PS DSG
★★★⯪☆ **31.7.19**
Different from the bigger Octavia but perhaps not by enough.
7.9 7.3 1200 52.9 -

Octavia 2.0 TDI 150PS SE L First Edition Estate DSG ★★★★☆ **2.9.20**
Leads the charge to take Skoda upmarket and mostly succeeds.
8.4 8.7 1510 73.0 -

Octavia Estate vRS ★★★★☆ **29.1.25**
A fine estate made more engaging rather than a great hot hatch made a bit bigger.
5.9 4.8 – 37.6 -

Superb SE L 2.0 TDI 150PS Estate
★★★★★ **17.7.24**
The large, functional estate car modernised in all the right ways.
8.4 8.2 1673 68.7 -

Karoq 2.0 TDI 150PS Scout
★★★⯪☆ **30.1.19**
Practical, comfortable Skoda is short on charm and dynamic polish.
8.9 9.6 1629 47.1 -

Elroq 85 Edition ★★★★⯪ **19.3.25**
Comfortable, efficient, practical and intuitive; a well-rounded, class-topping EV.
6.1 5.0 2085 3.5 246

Enyaq iV 80 Lounge ★★★★☆ **18.8.21**
Practical, rangy, well priced. Hits a sweet spot in the EV market.
8.3 7.8 2098 - 262

SMART

#1 Premium ★★★⯪☆ **8.11.23**
Drivability frustrations mar an otherwise agreeable experience.
5.6 4.6 1861 - 229

#3 Premium ★★★⯪☆ **15.5.24**
Makings of an interesting alternative EV but let down by the finer details.
5.7 4.9 1832 - 205

SUBARU

Crosstrek 2.0i e-Boxer Touring
★★★⯪☆ **28.2.24**
Improved manners for junior off-roader are welcome, if not transformative.
10.4 10.4 1620 45.3 -

Outback 2.5i Lineartronic Touring
★★★⯪☆ **27.9.23**
A pretty good answer to a question that only a few people asked.
9.3 8.7 1690 42.8 -

Solterra AWD Touring ★★★☆☆ **15.3.23**
A hint of Subaru-typical capability doesn't take this EV quite far enough.
6.7 6.2 2051 - 169

SUZUKI

Across 2.5 PHEV E-Four CVT
★★★★⯪ **7.4.21**
Excellent hybrid powertrain makes it one of the best PHEVs around.
6.4 5.8 1966 44.4 48

TESLA

Model 3 Standard Range Plus
★★★★☆ **4.9.19**
Wrinkles aside, it offers great electric performance and usability at this price.
5.8 4.7 1633 - 156

			0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Model 3 Long Range ★★★★☆	14.2.24	Packs a real punch. Both updated Model 3s are fine propositions.	4.4	3.4	1846	-	277
Model Y Long Range AWD ★★★★☆	23.3.22	A far better electric car than a premium SUV.	4.7	3.6	1978	-	234
Model S P90D ★★★★⯪	20.4.16	Great EV, intriguing driver's car. Not quite the perfect luxury GT.	3.5	3.0	2220	-	214
Model S Plaid ★★★⯪☆	2.8.23	Astonishing pace but not a fully rounded performance saloon.	2.4	1.7	2220	-	301
Model X 90D ★★★★☆	15.2.17	High-rise EV strains under SUV brief but still feels like a history maker.	5.2	4.2	2508	-	147

TOYOTA

			0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Aygo X Limited Edition ★★★⯪☆	11.5.22	A mostly very grown-up small car but also an expensive one.	15.6	16.5	974	58.7	-
Yaris 1.5 Hybrid Design ★★★★☆	23.9.20	Grows not only in stature but also in ability and subjective appeal.	9.2	8.8	1140	65.0	-
GR Yaris Circuit Pack ★★★★★	3.3.21	Toyota, on a roll with driver's cars, provides yet another winner.	5.2	5.0	1283	39.2	-
Corolla 2.0 Hybrid Design Touring Sports ★★★★☆	5.6.19	A big step up for Toyota in a vital sector and a better hybrid to boot.	8.5	7.7	1537	52.6	-
Prius Plug-in Design ★★★★☆	23.4.25	Better late than never for best Prius to date.	6.6	5.6	1542	56.1	46
bZ4X AWD Vision ★★★⯪☆	18.1.23	A decent effort all round but not exceptional in any way.	6.4	5.9	2023	-	208
Land Cruiser 2.8 D-4D 204 Invincible ★★★★☆	21.5.25	Remains supremely tough but now has added kerb appeal and drivability.	10.3	10.3	2503	30.7	-
Mirai Design Premium ★★★★☆	16.6.21	Impressive hydrogen fuel cell car has made strides but remains hamstrung overall.	8.7	8.3	1937	-	-
GR Supra Pro ★★★★☆	14.8.19	Fast, usable and has plenty going for it but leaves us wanting more.	4.4	3.6	1495	39.0	-
Hilux 2.8 D-4D GR Sport ★★★⯪☆	1.3.23	Gazoo-branded Ford Ranger Raptor rival is formidable but lacks fun factor.	10.0	9.5	2241	32.5	-

VAUXHALL

			0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Corsa 1.2 Turbo 100PS Ultimate Nav Auto ★★★⯪☆	22.1.20	Supermini is improved in many ways but lacks the appeal to match its price.	11.2	11.5	1171	51.8	-
Astra 1.2 Turbo 130PS GS Line ★★★⯪☆	5.10.22	Family hatchback's gentle push upmarket is only a qualified success.	9.9	9.2	1304	55.3	-
Crossland X 1.2 Turbo 130PS Elite ★★★☆☆	7.6.17	Typically practical and well priced, but Vauxhall can do better.	9.8	10.3	1278	54.2	-
Mokka 1.2 Turbo 130PS Elite Nav Premium Auto ★★★⯪☆	12.5.21	The driving experience sells a brave design effort just a little short.	9.3	9.1	1238	48.6	-
Grandland X Hybrid4 Ultimate Nav ★★★☆☆	22.4.20	Inspires big expectations and delivers few, but it's an interesting fleet option.	-	-	1800	-	-
Combo Life 1.5 Turbo D 100PS Energy ★★★⯪☆	27.12.18	Usable, spacious and practical, if not very pretty to look at.	14.7	16.2	1552	60.1	-

VOLKSWAGEN

			0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Polo 1.0 TSI 95PS SE ★★★★⯪	31.1.18	Brings 'big car' space, class, kit and finish to this class like never before.	10.7	11.2	1145	57.1	-
Polo 2.0 TSI GTI+ ★★★★☆	1.8.18	A usable, quick and vastly competent effort but not the most thrilling.	6.7	5.9	1342	46.8	-
Golf 1.5 eTSI 150PS Style DSG ★★★★⯪	22.7.20	Additional strengths and familiar ones carry it back to the class lead.	8.3	7.8	1330	60.0	-
Golf 1.5 TSI eHybrid Style ★★★★⯪	23.10.24	New plug-in Golf takes the PHEV hatchback's status to greater heights.	7.2	6.1	1619	46.5	-
Golf GTI ★★★⯪☆	25.9.24	'Mk8.5' version of hot hatchback is slick and effective but not a big enough step forward.	5.3	4.4	–	47.2	-
Golf R ★★★★☆	14.4.21	Most entertaining distillation of the Golf R formula yet – for a price.	4.4	3.7	1520	43.9	-
ID 3 Pro Performance Life ★★★★☆	31.3.21	Bland but with the substance to further the zero-emissions push.	7.0	6.5	1757	-	145
Arteon 2.0 BiTDI 240PS 4Motion R-Line ★★★⯪☆	27.9.17	Considered approach produces an executive flagship short on sparkle.	6.5	6.2	1866	55.6	-
Arteon eHybrid Elegance Shooting Brake ★★★⯪☆	9.6.21	Striking PHEV appears radical but upholds Volkswagen's traditions at heart.	7.1	6.0	1783	52.5	-
ID 7 Pro Match ★★★★⯪	13.3.24	Volkswagen finds some electric form in an unexpected format.	6.1	5.1	2162	-	239
T-Roc 2.0 TSI 190PS 4Motion SEL DSG ★★★★⯪	24.1.18	Shows performance verve, dynamic completeness and stylish swagger.	6.7	6.5	1534	37.5	-
T-Roc 1.5 TSI Evo R-Line Cabriolet DSG ★★⯪☆☆	10.6.20	It brings little worth having to the compact cabriolet niche.	-	-	1540	-	-
Tiguan 1.5 eTSI 150PS R-Line ★★★⯪☆	22.5.24	Functional and mature, but this isn't the engine or trim we would go for.	9.4	9.2	1606	44.9	-
ID 4 GTX Max ★★★⯪☆	27.10.21	GTX adds flavour to ID 4 but doesn't reimagine 'GTI' for the EV age.	6.2	5.6	2220	-	200
Touareg 3.0 TDI 4Motion R-Line Tech ★★★⯪☆	8.8.18	An inoffensive if forgettable bid at a luxury market breakthrough.	7.2	6.6	2292	41.6	-
Touareg 3.0 TSI eHybrid 4Motion Elegance ★★★⯪☆	5.6.24	It's versatile and likeably unpretentious but won't be a default company car choice.	6.2	5.7	2446	34.1	26
Touran 2.0 TDI 150PS SE Family DSG ★★★★☆	3.2.16	A spacious, refined and classy all-rounder – albeit a slightly bland one.	9.9	9.7	1666	-	-
Multivan 1.4 eHybrid Style ★★★★☆	8.3.23	Latest Volkswagen 'bus combines the best bits of both car and van.	8.4	7.1	2243	37.9	14
ID Buzz 77kWh Style Pro ★★★★☆	8.2.23	It costs plenty but offers versatility and luxury accomplishments.	9.5	9.1	2498	-	185
Grand California 600 ★★★⯪☆	2.1.20	Grandest California is classy but not half as clever as its smaller namesake.	15.8	16.7	3095	28.5	-
Transporter Sportline Black Edition Kombi SWB ★★★☆☆	30.3.22	Not compromised but hardly enhanced by its sporting agenda.	9.1	9.0	2108	39.1	-
Passat eHybrid 204PS Elegance ★★★★☆	13.11.24	Rounded and with good PHEV credentials, but less compelling than its sister car.	7.2	6.4	1836	44.5	73

VOLVO

			0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
EX30 Single Motor Extended Range Plus ★★★☆☆	1.5.24	Not enough key strengths – and not enough Volvo pragmatism.	5.7	5.1	1779	-	179
C40 Recharge Twin Ultimate ★★★⯪☆	13.4.22	A transitional model for Volvo that doesn't go quite far enough.	4.4	3.6	2172	-	194
XC40 D4 AWD First Edition ★★★★⯪	7.2.18	Wieldy, classy and simple. As good as its bigger brothers, if not better.	8.5	8.5	1735	43.8	-
XC60 D4 AWD R-Design ★★★⯪☆	5.7.17	The right product at the right time but lacking the right dynamic finish.	8.9	8.9	1836	48.9	-
XC90 D5 AWD Momentum ★★★★☆	17.6.15	A very impressive all-rounder with its own distinctive appeal.	8.3	8.3	2076	-	-
V60 D4 Momentum Pro Auto ★★★★☆	27.6.18	Fine-looking, capable and practical estate with only a few demerits.	8.9	8.3	1669	43.1	-
V60 T6 Recharge AWD R-Design ★★★★⯪	21.9.22	Strong hybrid system gives ageing Volvo a lot of fresh appeal.	4.9	4.3	2036	38.0	51
V90 T6 Recharge AWD R-Design ★★★★⯪	11.11.20	Hardly revolutionary but exceptionally appealing nonetheless.	5.6	4.9	2109	41.9	-

XPENG

			0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
G6 RWD Standard Range ★★★⯪☆	26.2.25	Chinese electric SUV lacks inspiration but has plenty of rational appeal.	6.8	6.2	2067	3.3	208

WHAT'S COMING WHEN

Cupra Raval December
All-new £25k Renault 5 rival gets a sumptuous interior and an array of digital trickery.

Alpine A390 Spring 2026
'A110 for five people' will rival the Porsche Macan Electric. Priced north of £60,000.

Nissan Micra October
Sixth-generation supermini is a twin of the Renault 5 and therefore will be electric only.

SCAN THE CODE FOR THE FULL LIST

Why I love...
THE FAST AND THE FURIOUS

BY CHARLIE MARTIN

No, The Fast and the Furious films are objectively not very good. But I doubt that even the greats can claim to have had anywhere near as much of an impact on their subject matter. The Shawshank Redemption didn't result in wide-reaching prison reform and it has been largely forgotten that Star Wars was intended as an allegory for the Vietnam war.

But would Toyota have reprised the Supra were it not for the original Fast and Furious film propelling it into the limelight? And would the original Dodge Charger be commanding such outrageous premiums today were it not for anti-hero Dominic Toretto's boast of his having "so much torque, the chassis twisted off the line"?

I'm quite unsure any of it would have happened were it not for these films' celebration of a certain car culture. The cars that feature in them – the first five films, at the very least – are protagonists in the same sense as the human characters, with distinct personalities and sub-stories.

If any scene encapsulates the franchise's reverence for its four-wheeled cast members, it's the first film's duel between the freshly rebuilt Supra and a stunning Ferrari F355 Spider.

It begins with friendly banter at a traffic light: hero Brian O'Connor, driving the Toyota, asks how much the Ferrari costs. Its driver outs himself as an arse, replying "more than you can afford, pal", in that condescending tone reserved only for the worst kind of new-money moron. Toretto gives the order: "Smoke him."

A dodgem ride of a duel ensues, the nuclear-orange Supra scything through traffic while angsty rock music blares in the background. It will raise a hair on even the most car-agnostic viewer, and the layman with no car knowledge can still revel in the underdog's decisive victory.

Black Charger became an icon, starring in six of the 10 films – after a rebuild, presumably

"What's the retail on one of those?"

> **"It legitimised an arm of car culture that was belittled"**

It all served to legitimise an arm of car culture that was mocked and belittled for years. More broadly, it validated the notion that you can derive fun from the act of driving. And that has gone on to ripple through the world of motoring. Hell, maybe even Western culture itself.

Sure, the films get a lot of technical details wrong. Ever noticed that the Volkswagen Jetta in the first film doesn't have brake calipers? And why does O'Connor's hi-vis Mitsubishi Eclipse warn him loudly of a 'danger to manifold' before the passenger footwell falls out? But that doesn't matter to the person who wouldn't spot such things in the first place. If anything, the sheer confidence the films have in such inaccuracies only underscores their outlandishness.

It's well known, for example, that the runway from the pivotal plane chase scene in the sixth film would have to be more than 25 miles long to have accommodated an entire 13 minutes of 120mph action. But who's counting?

So there you have it. I love The Fast and the Furious films, and I'm not ashamed to admit it. And if you disagree, I've only one thing to say in reply: "Forget about it, cuh."

What we did this week

LICENCE TO CHILL

I was enormously impressed by the DVLA when I had to renew my driving licence recently. The process on its website is perfectly slick – even though it includes verifying your identity via a separate app (just tap your passport on your phone) – and the new card arrived at my door just five working days later. How much better life would be if all mundane tasks were so simple. **KRIS CULMER**

HEAVEN ALL MITEY

I remember last year being more than a little concerned about the UK's insect population declining; I could drive on the motorway for hours and still be able to eat off my front bumper. Not this year: I've just spent a good 15 minutes removing a thick mask of flies that my Cupra Leon acquired on a run down the A3. A depressingly gory but also faintly reassuring endeavour. **FELIX PAGE**

GONE TO THE DOGS

Goodwood never disappoints for a brilliant day out, and so it proved again – yet this time there wasn't a car in sight, save for those of sponsor Discovery. Goodwoof is a dog show, the kind of occasion that sounds like the name was created first and the event backfilled accordingly. But it works, and has that thing in common with all Goodwood gatherings: you leave with a smile on your face. **MARK TISSHAW**

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